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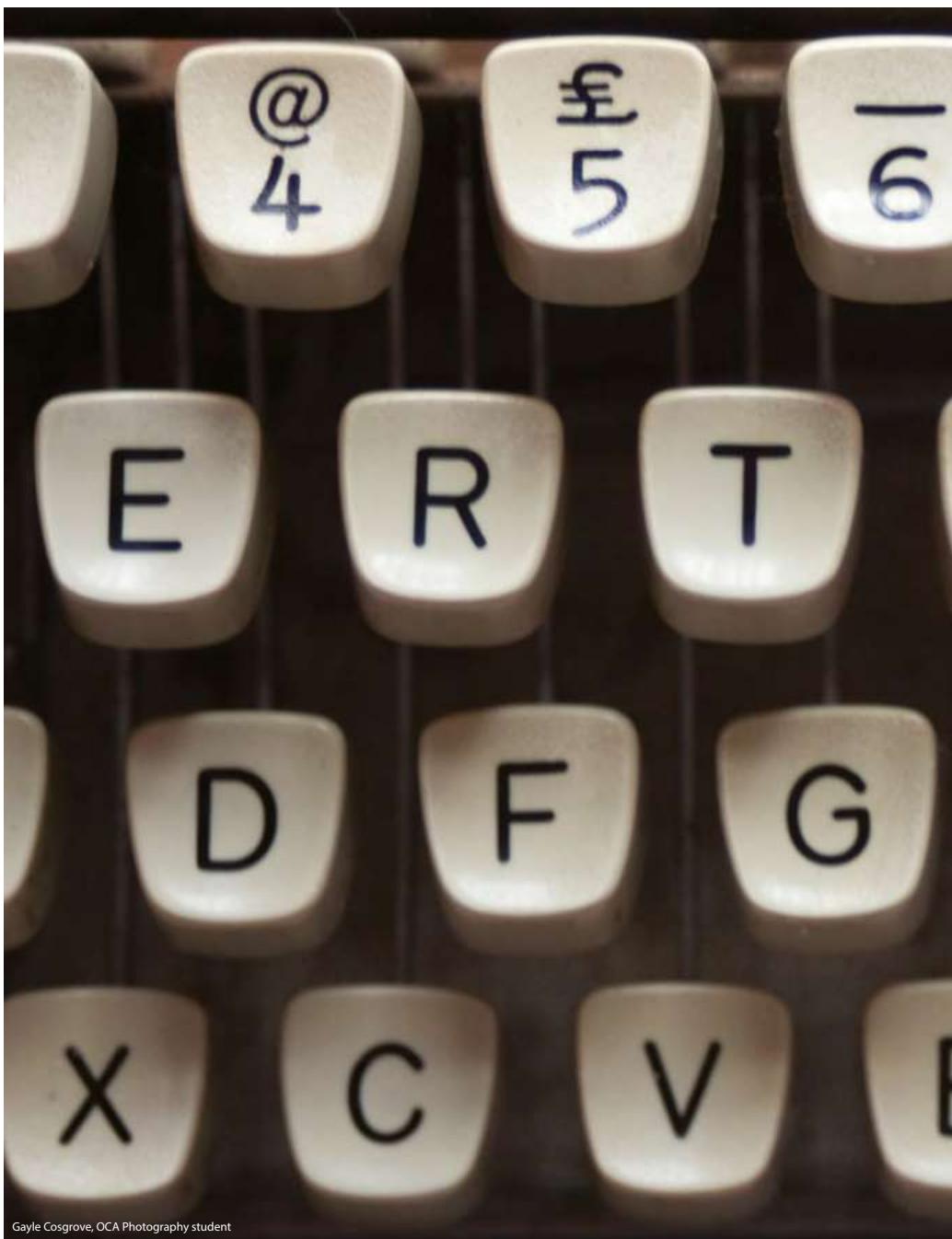
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Deborah Riccio  
Writing student

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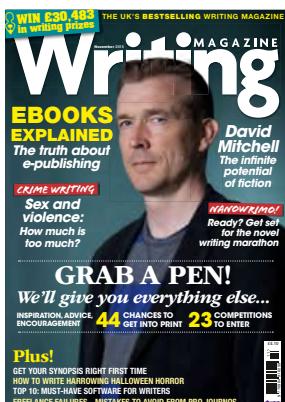


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# Welcome...



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## Dear Reader

Grab your pen! We've got a lot to get through this month.

It's the time of year when many of us like to batten down the hatches and make major headway on the work in progress, or get started on new projects. And of course, that coincides with one of the most fun activities on the writing calendar, National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo, although surely InterNaNoWriMo would be more appropriate?) Year round, we all pore over our manuscripts, scribble words and shape our stories, but the common goal of NaNoWriMo and its on- and offline support network really draw you into a wider writing community, even as we lock all the doors, cease all real-world socialising and attempt to race through 50,000 words in a month. But its real benefit is something of a psychological trick: it's easier to keep moving than get started. So don't worry about where you'll end up, just set yourself a target, whether it's the full 50,000 words or something you'll find more manageable, banish that blank page and write *something*. The momentum and motivational boost of having a completed first draft could keep you rolling all year.

If you end up with a manuscript you feel is worthy of publication, you might be tempted to try publishing your own ebook, but see this month's article (p22) first to ensure you get off to the right start. Elsewhere, we look at ways to get under the skin of your characters (p12, p42) and, just in time for Halloween, how to scare readers out of theirs (p14, p75).

Now, this month more than ever, get writing...



**Jonathan Telfer**  
 Editor



**STEVEN CHAPMAN**



**PATSY COLLINS**

is a romantic novelist and the author of over 300 published short stories. She gives occasional writing workshops and talks, and runs two writing blogs. Womagwriter.blogspot.co.uk provides up to date writers' guidelines, news and advice for worldwide woman's magazine markets. Patsy-Collins.blogspot.co.uk gives regular links to free-to-enter writing competitions and publication opportunities along with other writing news. Website: <http://patsycollins.uk>



**SIMON HALL**

is an author of crime fiction and a BBC Television news correspondent. His novels are about a television reporter who covers crimes and gets so involved in the cases he helps the police to solve them. He has contributed short stories to a range of magazines and is also a tutor in creative writing, teaching at popular writers' schools such as Swanwick, Fishguard and Winchester, on cruise ships and overseas. For more, see his website: [www.thetvdetective.com](http://www.thetvdetective.com)

is a horror author from Leeds, who also dabbles with thrillers and science fiction. He enjoys nothing more than a good blood-curdling tale and spends far too much of his time reading, watching, and writing horror. His latest short story, *Mama's Boy*, features in the Knightwatch Press anthology *Once Bitten*. Most days he just sits inside polishing his chainsaw and praying for the zombocalypse. He blogs about writing, sometimes coherently, at <http://stevenchapmanwriter.com>

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# In this issue ...

## INTERVIEWS AND PROFILES

### COVER STORY

#### 16 Star interview: David Mitchell

Exploring infinite possibilities is the joy of novel writing for the *Cloud Atlas* and *Bone Clocks* author

#### 20 On writing: Seamus Heaney

#### 20 How I got published: YA author David Hofmeyr

#### 26 Beat the bestsellers

The techniques and tricks of Lee Child

#### 44 Celebrity under the microscope

A micro-critique of the beginning of one of literary history's most famous 'bad novels', *Paul Clifford* by Robert Bulwer-Lytton

#### 52 Subscriber spotlight

WM subscribers share their writing success stories

#### 58 Circles' roundup

Writing groups share their experiences

#### 74 Crime file: Michael Robotham

#### 86 Author profile: Sophie Jackson

The novelist got 4.5 million online hits for her fan fiction before being snapped up by a major publisher for her debut

#### 108 My writing day: Ann Cleeves

The crime writer takes a no-nonsense approach to her busy existence

## NON-FICTION

#### 46 Talk it over: Like life

Advice for a reader worried about walking the line between fiction and non-fiction in personal memoirs

### COVER STORY

#### 50 What I wish I'd known about: Going freelance

Learn from the experiences of three veteran freelance feature writers

#### 83 Going to market

#### 103 Travel writing know-how



## PUBLISHING

### 11 Grumpy Old Bookman: Publish and be damned

Is it better to be a small fish in a big pond or the only fish in your own pond?

### COVER STORY

#### 22 E-publishing:

#### Digital dos and don'ts

Navigate common misconceptions so that, with clear understanding and goals, you can publish your ebook yourself



## WIN

a Matador self-publishing package, worth up to £2,500. Enter our exclusive, free-to-enter competition  
See p25

## WRITING LIFE

### COVER STORY

#### 28 NaNoWriMo: A novel in a month

The annual writing challenge is about more than just getting 50,000 words on the page

#### 34 Ten top tips: Writing on the go

Out and about? You can still get on with your writing

#### 38 Beginners: Point in view

A clear mind makes for easier writing

#### 47 Novel ideas

#### 48 The business of writing: Coming with a crisis of confidence

Dark nights and negative demons can quash a writer's confidence. We talk to writers who have trained their demons into submission

#### 110 Notes from the margin: Not now, I'm working!

At home doesn't mean at ease for our columnist



# FICTION

## 12 Fiction basics: Character study

Get under the skin of your characters easily by following our advice

### COVER STORY

## 14 Fiction: Under the covers

Get in the mood for a Halloween tale by exploring some classics from the genre

## 31 Fiction: Fatten your first draft

101 tips, tricks and complete cheats to increase your word count

## 40 Open short story winner

Read the winning entry in our crime story competition

## 42 Characters: What's in a name?

Finding the right name can be crucial to your character development

## 62 Subscriber-only short story winner

Read the winning entry in our 'heaven sent' short story competition

### COVER STORY

## 64 Fiction focus: Don't mention the S word!

Facing the dreaded task of writing a synopsis for your novel? Here's how to tackle it

## 70 Writing for children: Mermaid tales

Splash about with ideas for magical undersea stories

### COVER STORY

## 72 Crime: Matters of the flesh

How much sex and violence should feature in your crime novel? We test the limits

### COVER STORY

## 75 Horror: What's your favourite scary movie?

Horror writers can learn a lot from watching horror films. Here are some modern classics to unsettle down with this Halloween

# COMPETITIONS AND EXERCISES

## 36 Pen pushers: In a flash

Exercises to help you cut your fiction into lean shape

## 27 Red editing pen

## 39 Open competition launch

Win cash prizes and publication in our open competition for flash fiction

## 59 Tell me a story

You don't have to go far, or plumb the depths of your imagination, to find great stories – your writers' group is full of them

## 61 Subscriber-only competitions launch

Win cash prizes and publication in our latest subscriber-only short story and poetry competitions

# POETRY

## 66 Poetry workshop: Don't trust a tree

Get in the Halloween spirit by exploring a subscriber's spooky poem

## 68 Poetry from A to Z

An alphabetic guide through the language of poetry



# RESOURCES

## 6 Miscellany

## 8 Letters

## 21 Editorial calendar

## 74 Excuse me officer

### COVER STORY

## 78 Technology for writers: Top tools

Ten essential pieces of software to make you more productive

## 80 Writers' web watch

Online showcases for your writing

## 81 Computer clinic

## 82 Helpline

Your writing problems solved

## 85 Research for writers: Beyond Google

There's more to search engines than Google



# WRITERS' NEWS

## 88 Your essential monthly round-up of competitions, paying markets, opportunities to get into print and publishing industry news

# THE WORLD OF WRITING



Animals, anti-ageism and arts for all are celebrated in this month's wide world of writing – but plain words, and no blanking swearing, OK?

## ANIMAL MAGIC ON SHOW

From Aesop's Fables to Ted Hughes's *Crow*, the stories we tell about animals are often stories about us, says the blurb for *Animal Tales*, an exhibition at the British Library ending on 1 November.

'From the earliest marks made by humans in caves to the modern-day internet full of cute cats, animals have been enduring media stars,' the Library's publicity announcement continued.

'Symbols of the sacred or the profane, the domesticated or the ferocious, animals have always fed our imagination helping us to make sense of the world and ourselves. Inspiring writers, poets, scientists and artists through the ages, a library can become the largest zoo in the world when you begin to track down the creatures lurking among the pages on the shelves.'

*'Animal Tales'* explores what wild – and tamed – creatures say about us when they take on literary or artistic form and displays richly illustrated editions of traditional tales, from Anansi [stories of Ashanti heritage] to Little Red Riding Hood.

The Library invites visitors to be 'closer to nature with a soundscape based on the Library's collection of sound recordings, with illustrations and poems by Mark Doty and Darren Waterston'.



The title page from Sally Sketch's 1821 edition of *An Alphabetical Arrangement of Animals for Little Naturalists*

## Figures of speech



IT TOOK AN ARMY OF CIVIL SERVANTS TO DELIVER THE PACKAGE. THE MINISTER HAD DEMANDED SOMETHING CONCRETE BE PUT ON THE TABLE FOR DISCUSSION.

## WHEN AGE IS AN ISSUE

When did forty become the cut-off age for discussing 'promising' debut authors? asked Dennis Abrams in Publishing Perspectives.

'There's *Granta*'s list of the Most Promising Authors Under 40. There's the *Guardian*'s 20 Writers Under 40 to Watch. There's *The New Yorker*'s 20 Under 40,' he said.

He pointed out that Penelope Fitzgerald, was nearly 58 years old when she published her first non-fiction work, a biography of the pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones, 'and a veritably ancient 61 when her first novel, *The Golden Child* was published in 1977. Of course two years later she also won the Booker for *Offshore*. So maybe, just maybe, is it possible that "older" debut authors have something worth saying to a society seemingly obsessed with youth?

48-year-old British novelist Claire Fuller

(pictured) wrote in the *Guardian*, about a new writers group: the Prime Writers: a group of about fifty authors who were over forty when their debut novel was published.'

(see p58)

Claire said: 'Of course it's a terrific achievement for writers to get their novels published whatever their birth certificate says, and we acknowledge that our group treads a fine line between being supportive and being ageist ourselves with our over-forty entry criterion. And other publishing prejudices shouldn't be forgotten, including gender and race – but someone has to set the record straight about age.'





## PLAIN WORDS VERSUS THE GRAND STYLE

The history of English prose can be seen as a dialectical struggle between two tendencies: plain versus grand, or mandarin style, observed Jim Holt, in *The New York Times*.

Partisans of the plain style, he said, included Dryden, Swift, Shelley (in his letters), Hazlitt, Matthew Arnold, Orwell, Hemingway, EB White, Gore Vidal, Joan Didion, Michael Lewis and *The New Yorker*. Partisans of the mandarin style include - in addition to its begetters, the scribes of the King James Bible - Dr Johnson, Gibbon, Addison, Carlyle, Pater, Ruskin, Nabokov, William F Buckley Jr, Elizabeth Hardwick, Lewis Lapham and *Time* magazine...

'But the all-time standard-bearer for the mandarin style has to be Sir Thomas Browne. This 17th-century English physician and philosopher became a prolific contributor of novel words to the English language. Among his 784 credited neologisms are "electricity," "hallucination," "medical," "ferocious," "deductive" and "swaggy."

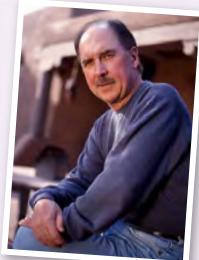
But we're told not all his coinages took off - such as 'retromingent' for urinating backward.

## The curse of new writing

Cut down on the bad language, new writers are advised by *First Blood* author David Morrell in *The Successful Novelist: A Lifetime of Lessons about Writing and Publishing*, out in paperback since 2008 and highlighted on the Goodreads website.

'If the passage absolutely demands cursing, be moderate. A little of it goes a long way. I've seen beginning writers pepper curse words through sentence after sentence. "If you don't -blanking- get your -blanking-blank-blank- in to this house this -blanking-minute, I'm going to -blank- your blank- and nail it to the -blanking- door."

'Two things happen when I read this junk: I get bored and I get angry. I didn't pick up your book to read garbage. If this is as clever as you can be, I don't want to read your prose. In life if you met someone who spoke like



this, you'd want to flee. Then why put this stuff on the page? As near as I can determine, this abomination occurs because a writer is corrupted by the awful blanking dialog that movies inflict on us these days. It's also a sign of insecurity.

'The writer wonders if the dialogue is strong enough and decides a lot of -blanking-blank- will do the trick. Someone might object that this kind of dialogue is realistic in certain situations - intense scenes involving policemen or soldiers for example. I can only reply that in my research I spend considerable time with policemen and soldiers. Few of them curse any more than a normal person would. This garbage isn't realistic. It merely draws attention to itself and holds back the story.

'Use it sparingly.'



## BEWARE... 'THE ACRONYMS ARE COMING'

*Times* writer at large and associate editor Ben Macintyre contributed a stylish feature about 'acronyms - the grey squirrels of language' to his newspaper.

'The acronyms are coming,' he wrote. 'Marching across the language in their thousands, blunt, unlovely, artificial abbreviations, easy to coin and virtually ineradicable, forcing out perfectly good words and replacing them with ugly initials.'

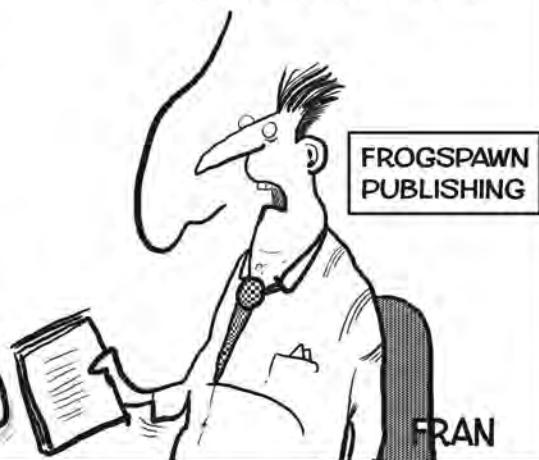
Among other points he made: 'Some acronyms are so sturdy and longstanding they have genuinely entered the language: who remembers that scuba stands for Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus, or that Joseph Cyril Bamford, pioneer of earth-moving equipment, gave us the JCB?'

The military had played a large part in the spread of acronymophilia - 'the current leader is COMNAVSEACOMBATSYSENGSTA, which stands for Commander Naval Sea Combat Systems Engineering Station.'

Ben - a former editor of *The Times Weekend Review*, ex-New York correspondent, Paris Bureau chief, US editor and parliamentary sketch-writer - ended in fine style pointing out that acronyms were intended to be concise, economical and efficient, but there were now so many that they often sowed confusion.

'Nato is, of course, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, but it is also the Nepal Association of Tour Operators... We need to stop abbreviating everything. We need the Society To Prevent Automatically Coining Ridiculous Overwrought New and Yet Misleading Shorthand.'

Sometimes it's difficult to put into WORDS what you feel about a manuscript...



Does that give you a flavour of how I felt?



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We want to hear your news and views on the writing world, your advice for fellow writers – and don't forget to tell us what you would like to see featured in a future issue...

Write to: Letters to the editor, *Writing Magazine*, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD; email: [letters@writersnews.co.uk](mailto:letters@writersnews.co.uk). (Include your name and address when emailing letters. Ensure all

letters, a maximum of 250 words, are exclusive to *Writing Magazine*. Letters may be edited.)

When referring to previous articles/letters, please state month of publication and page number.



## Blogging away the rejections...

I recently set up a writing blog on Tumblr called myromancenovel after being disheartened by receiving rejection after rejection with my writing projects, and found Chris Glithero's article *Unblocking The Blog* (*WM*, August) extremely useful.

I fully recommend blogging and as a complete novice and technophobe I found it much easier to set up and maintain than I expected. In the short time I have been blogging I have gained followers and the numbers are growing, as is my confidence. Having a community of people showing their support (however big or small) and enjoying your work is exhilarating and it's boosted my motivation to carry on writing. I have even been asked to write a guest blog about the process and the outcome of resubmitting a romance novel to a major book publisher who initially rejected it. I may have a go at monetising my blog once I get a larger number of followers through advertisements as suggested by Chris. However, I have found the major pull of blogging is having a forum to express my thoughts on writing. I am also gaining invaluable advice from other writers/literary organisations through their blogs and I like to give support back through appreciating and following their work too. Most importantly I have to keep my followers updated with my writing progress to maintain their interest, so there's no throwing in the towel or procrastinating for me! Just writing, learning and getting better at my craft.

DAWN REEVES  
Liverpool

## Ideas from Amitav

*Writing Magazine* has a habit of adding several books to my reading list each month. September's magazine was no exception, the star interview with Amitav Ghosh being of particular interest. I am now keen to read The Ibis Trilogy but it is his other obsession – environmental issues – that prompted me to write in. I am presently doing an MSc in social responsibility and sustainability (my main area of interest being food waste in the catering industry) and I have often wondered why I do not use this subject matter within my own fiction. Perhaps it is because I want to keep my 'real' world and my 'writing' world separate. However Amitav Ghosh has inspired me to try.

NATALIE PEARSON  
Loughborough, Leicestershire

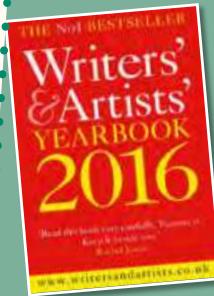
## STAR LETTER

### Blockbusting

Here it is again, that feeling now becoming depressingly familiar. For me it is a very physical thing, writer's block. Much like walking into a brick wall, it knocks the wind out of me and I ricochet off it painfully, turning and running in the opposite direction before anyone sees. I immerse myself in anything but writing while the sight of a pen makes me nauseous and the sight of a laptop encourages violence. I give in willingly every time I encounter the slightest obstacle telling myself it just wasn't meant to happen today.

The longer it goes on the harder it gets as the 'to write' pile grows, deadlines get closer and I feel the pressure to just 'write through it' because isn't that what real writers do? I know I ought to forgive writing for the wrongs it's done me lately, the rows we've had, and try to remember what I loved about it in the first place. The best way to do that (or so they tell me) is by actually writing something, writing anything. Perhaps I ought to write a letter to a magazine complaining about writing. Anything to get my name into print – surely that would do the trick?

CATE FRANCES  
Torquay, Devon



The star letter each month earns a copy of the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2016*, courtesy of Bloomsbury, [www.writersandartists.co.uk](http://www.writersandartists.co.uk)

# THE NAME GAME



In answer to Linda Fawke's letter (Letters, WM, Sept) it took me ages to decide whether to use a pseudonym or not, to the point I even wrote a poem about my indecision.

I've only written poetry, but love every genre within it, from the serious (dare I say) 'fluffy' stuff, to the humour; of which once my work on a website was described as 'pithy'. Last year I read an article with the words 'you only use a pseudonym when you don't know who you are'. To a degree I agree, hence the months of my inner turmoil. Humour under pseudonym or not?

Hiding it? No. I love writing it and certainly not ashamed. Pseudonym reason? After having a few serious works published, I realised there was a problem with audience.

My alias (Pippa Sherman) has been published a couple of times and I'm proud of it and I have cheered with friends and family. I know I will never meet the readers, but the point is the pseudonym is a guide for the reader of what works they are picking up from the shelf. After all, would you think of Pam Ayres (love her, pictured above) writing a deep free verse, seriously intricate poem? My personal answer was no. So rightly or wrongly, this is what finally swayed me. I have to say I had fun thinking of one though!

NICOLLETTE FOREMAN  
Chelmsford, Essex

## Dearest diary

I really enjoyed Helen Yendall's article *Dear Diary* (WM, Sept). It could well have been written about myself. As mentioned in the article I also started writing my diary in 1970 aged twelve in a Letts football diary in pencil. I have continued ever since and have become my family's private Google search engine. I am always being asked, 'When did so and so die?', holidays, special occasions you name it. But I never really appreciated how useful they could be for getting a feel for a certain decade or time in history. I am sure I will continue to write on a daily basis along with brushing my teeth, although not at the same time. I cannot imagine not doing either and will one day use the many volumes for inspiration for writing.

GRAHAM COWLEY  
Sutton Coldfield

## INSPIRING PROCRASTINATION

As I packed up, ready to move classrooms, at the end of the summer term I came across a dozen or so old copies of WM which I had obviously squirrelled away for a rainy day. As I had planned to begin my, long overdue, children's book over the summer break I decided what better way to get inspired than read through them.

So here we are six weeks later, I have now returned to school, my notepad remains crisp and empty, but I did manage to read each and every magazine cover to cover. And as I write this I have the October edition open on my lap, a pen and notepad poised on the table and a myriad of ideas and characters dancing around in my head all vying for attention.

All I need to do now is pick up that pen and write.

Thanks for a great magazine, even if it does hinder my writing.

ESTHER GREEN  
Corby, Northants



Like Helen Yendall, I also write a diary and have done for 24 years (*Dear Diary*, WM, September). But what about keeping a writing journal?

It's a habit that novelist Elizabeth George advocates in her excellent book, *Write Away*, on her approach to fiction and the writing life. She begins a new 'Journal of a Novel' at the start of each book she writes, recording the highs and lows of the writing process.

I decided to try something similar while writing my second novel, *The Indelible Stain*, and while I didn't write something in it every day, as Elizabeth George does, I found it a useful place to let off steam by ranting about what wasn't going well, as well as congratulating myself when I'd solved a particular thorny plotting issue.

But it's only now, as I'm drafting my current novel, that the journal really comes into its own. As I look back it's reassuring to find I had exactly the same doubts, questions and moments of despair the last time around.

So, all I need to do is... keep writing! If I managed to solve all those terrifying issues last time, surely I should be able to do so again? Here's hoping.

WENDY PERCIVAL  
Crediton, Devon

# Welcome writers



I am new to the world of writing. It is something I've wanted to do since I was a teenager, but have never had the time, or perhaps the courage, to get round to it. Don't get me wrong, I have had a couple of brushes with this world. I am a professional actor, and I have twice had to write an emergency play when shows I have been producing have become writerless orphans. However they weren't serious attempts, more like desperate necessities.

I decided two months ago that I needed to do something about this. I had to see if I could write anything that another person would find good enough to publish. It was at this point that fate stepped in and I saw September's *Writing Magazine* in my local newsagent. I hadn't realised anything like this existed. What an inspiration. I particularly loved Liz Gregory's *Practical Writing Activities* and James McCreet's article on structuring, however the article that really caught my eye was Simon Whaley's *Back to School*. Hearing the readers' stories gave me the kick that I needed, and I have now signed up to a writing course. I've sent in my first assignment, and am awaiting its return with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

So a new chapter of my life has begun.  
Bring it on!

MARK JONES  
Reading, Berkshire

The writing bug had given me an itch that needed scratching, yet I realised I was having a lot of trouble reaching it. I had a plot and no clue how to start it, just the idea.

I came across the *Writing Magazine* website. Determined to have a proper try at writing I took an annual subscription to see what articles might be of interest. I can already say that it has been truly worth the investment. I never really thought of writing for the pure enjoyment of it. Since reading two issues, I now cannot control the flow of inspiration which seems to present itself, every news headline I hear, the people I meet and each way I look. Everything everywhere could be a potential short story, poem or novel. There is now a conflict between my inner writer and, well, life... I wonder if this affects many other readers.

Thank you WM for getting me started on an exciting new path. I have no idea what direction or the end, but I will enjoy it.

SALLY BOND  
Colchester, Essex

# Don't dodge dialect

We are often told by the experts to be careful with regional accents in dialogue. Be frugal with the 'Bejabbers', sparing with the 'Och ayes', and niggardly with the 'Indeed to goodnesses'. How true is this?

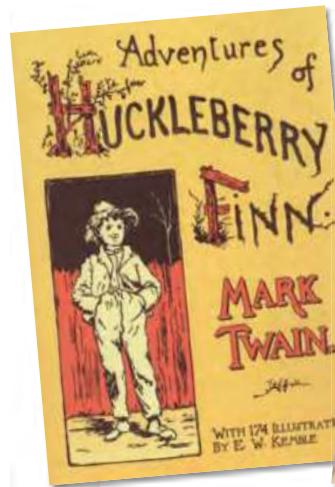
After re-reading *Sons and Lovers* and *Huckleberry Finn* I would suggest not very. Mr Morel in the DH Lawrence classic speaks in dialect throughout – and is the better for it. He leaps off the page and sits beside you.

Same goes for Huck Finn. His gamey, slangy-twangy American South-West accent is Huck and Huck alone. As for Jim, the escaped slave, his character would be a bland nothingness without his African-American patois.

So, let's hear it for 'Och, aye', three cheers for 'Bejabbers', and hooray for 'Indeed to goodness'.

FRED CANAVAN

East Cowes, Isle of Wight



## MISERY



Lorraine Mace's *Misery Loves Company* (*Notes from the Margin*, WM, Sept) struck a chord.

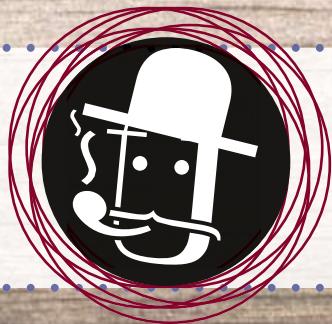
So many times in so many how-to books and even in the pages of *Writing Magazine* one of the main subjects discussed is how you need to have conflict, conflict, conflict. It seems, to make a good plot basis or story idea, this is the prerequisite.

Surely then, this is why most writers fall into the pit of misery in their writing. Even Lorraine herself admits to the very same.

Conflict, by its very nature, usually results in some sort of misery for someone in some way.

I would as a 'newbie' gladly accept any advice on how to 'cheer up' my writing. If it's depressing reading it then just think how depressing it is writing it.

PAUL TAYLOR  
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk,



# Publish and be damned

Is it better to be a small fish in a big pond or the only fish in your own pond?

**Michael Allen** suggests the latter

I've got a friend who's writing a novel, and when he's finished it he will probably ask my advice. Do I recommend trying to find an agent? Or approaching publishers himself? Or should he, perhaps, go in for this modern self-publishing thing?

Well, I'm not going to give him any direct advice one way or the other; I shall lose a friend if it all goes wrong. But what I might do is tell him about what I recently found in my local library.

I was browsing the shelves which house the books in a well established genre, and I came across a 2014 novel by an author whose name is known to me. I've read some of her books before.

I'm not going to tell you this author's real name – I'll call her Freda – or the genre she works in. What I am going to tell you is that Freda is the author of nearly twenty novels. She has won a couple of prestigious prizes, her books are translated into about a dozen languages, and she is a full-time professional writer. She is also represented by a leading literary agent, and is published by an imprint which is owned and operated by one of the so-called Big Five publishers.

I think it is fair to say, therefore, that Freda is a successful writer by 2015 standards. You can't do much better unless you're one of the Stephen Kings or JK Rowlings of this world.

Freda's current position, please note, is the result of twenty years of flat-out effort. The first five years will have been taken up by completing several first drafts of novels (possibly regarded as 'promising'); then she had to get an agent interested, and then the agent had to find a publisher. All of which required time, much effort, and a dollop of pure luck along the way.

So, after five years perhaps, Freda has a foot in the door. And she's with a 'top publisher'. Her friends are

mighty impressed.

Another fifteen years of really hard work follow; she produces a book a year, gets good reviews, et cetera. At the end of which – well, I haven't seen Freda's bank account, but I doubt very much whether she is doing any better than the average schoolteacher. (And she doesn't have a teacher's pension either.) But it's all worthwhile, and it's all immensely rewarding, because she's achieved her lifetime ambition: she's a full-time professional writer. Wow!

And perhaps my friend might achieve all that too, if he put his mind to it? Right? You reckon? Possible, isn't it? So perhaps the traditional route to success is still the best one for him to take? Do you think?

Hmmm.

Let's go back to that hardback book of Freda's, the 2014 publication which I got out of the library. First of all, I note that this hardback book is small – just a bit over 8" x 5". The cover is deadly dull; there are 34 lines to the page, and they are long lines for the book's size, so the margins are narrow and cramped. The size of the print is too small for comfortable reading, perhaps 9.5 point if it's lucky. Overall, therefore, this Big Five publication is not a remotely impressive object.

Having examined Freda's 2014 hardback, I compared it with the nearest Terry Pratchett book on my shelf. This is much bigger: about 10" x 6". Yet there are only 33 lines to the page, with plenty of space between them (11.75 point on 15.5 point Minion), which means it's very easy on the eye. The cover is a specially commissioned piece of artwork.

What does this comparison of hardbacks tell us? Well, what it suggests to me is that the designer of Freda's book was only interested in one thing. He wanted to keep production costs down to an absolute minimum. Unsurprisingly the final product looks cheap and nasty.

Oh – and to add insult to injury, Freda's book contains a typographical error in the... very... first... line. Nobody in this big prestigious publishing house noticed it. Or corrected it.

What Freda's hardback suggests to me is that Freda is not one of this firm's really big sellers. The hard truth is, therefore, that nobody in the company cares much about her.

And before long, I suspect, her publishing firm will have a new boss in charge; someone appointed by the French or German owners of the conglomerate. And the new boss will look at the sales chart for all his authors, and will strike out the names of those at the bottom. And then it will be Thank you, Freda, and Goodbye. After twenty years of hard grind in the salt mines of big-time publishing, her 'career' will be over.

And so, when my novelist friend comes to me with his recently completed novel in his hot little hand, that's the kind of truth about modern Big Five publishing which I will point out him. And I will add this. It may take years to find an agent and publisher. So is that really the best way to spend the twenty most productive years of your adult life? Might it be more worthwhile to publish your own book(s) to begin with, and see how you get on? If you make a success of it, big-time publishing can always come to you. **Vm**

“ ”

*Freda's book contains a typographical error in the... very... first... line. Nobody in this big prestigious publishing house noticed it.*

# CHARACTER study

Get under the skin of your characters easily with advice from crimewriter **Simon Hall**

**I**t's curious how the strangest experiences can teach a writer the most telling lessons.

I was teaching at the Swanwick Writers' Summer School in August, when I somehow found myself dragged into 'acting' in the end of week pantomime (All together now – Oh, yes I did.)

It was a comedy version of *Romeo and Juliet*, and I played Tybalt, devoted cousin of the heroine.

My part involved dressing up in a leather doublet, lacy shirt and Shakespearean shorts, to perform in front of several hundred discerning writers. In honesty, I felt, to be frank, a right wally.

It turned out to be great fun, which I thoroughly expected as that's the heart of Swanwick. What I wasn't prepared for was that it also gave me an important insight into characterisation.

The appearance and manner of an imaginary friend can be powerful allies for a writer in giving readers an immediate understanding of the person.

## The look

When you introduce a new character, you quickly want to let the reader know what they look like. But think carefully about how you do it – and how readers jump to their own conclusions – and you can achieve much more than just how the person appears.

For example, take the hairstyle. What does a smart, conventional cut say about a person? Perhaps their job requires people to trust them? Maybe they're a solicitor, doctor, or even a sales rep?

Compare that with the plumes of a Mohican, or long hair, dyed red? Can you imagine such a person working as a barrister or council planning officer?

Which of the different styles gives you a sense of the person being a conformer, knowing their appearance will be under scrutiny, and which a couldn't-care-less rebel?

Imagine a character's eyes. What impression does someone with clear, sharp blue eyes give, as opposed to a red, inflamed bloodshot appearance?

Who's alert, sleeping well, feeling good and healthy? And which one has worries, is perhaps even haunted by something?

There are many characterisation points to be scored with the face. What about a person's teeth? Bright white and impeccable, versus yellowing and misaligned?

Which of the two takes more care over their appearance? Which might have had cosmetic work done? What does that say about the person in terms of their vanity? And which one is likely to be better off, live in a more expensive home, drive a newer car, move in elevated social circles?

Body shapes can help in building up a sense of character, too. Which people have the most discipline, the well-toned or the tubbier? Which might go to a gym, shop at Waitrose and eat out at fine restaurants, and which get their food from value stores while looking forward to a burger and chips as a treat?

Overall appearances can also be important. Take two tough guy heroes, Daniel Craig as James Bond and John McClane, as played by Bruce Willis, in the *Die Hard* films. Both are men of action in spectacular fashion, but look at how differently they're classically depicted.



Mr Bond will usually appear clean shaven and wearing an impeccable dinner jacket, while McClane will be stubbly, covered in grime and wearing a vest.

Which is the ladies' man? Which is the more precise, the more exacting? And which doesn't care what the consequences are, so long as the job gets done?

Small details can also help in enhancing a sense of character. Imagine introducing a woman into your story and paying particular attention to describing her hands. Are they smooth and manicured, the nails beautifully painted, or rough and calloused, perhaps with burns? Which of those two is a beautician, or a model? And which a chef?

All of these insights can come in no more than a glance of appearances, and courtesy of one of our oldest and finest friends in writing – show not tell.

## Clothing

My character, Tybalt, was young and flash, hence the lacy shirt and leather doublet. He also fancied himself as a tough guy, and so carried a large sword. All that was conveyed in our Romeo and Juliet by the look of the character.

There are obvious opportunities for writers in thinking carefully about the clothing a character wears. Someone sporting a suit creates a very different impression to a person wearing ripped jeans. And don't just stop with saying the character was wearing a suit. Use of detail can bring an even more vivid sense of the person.

If it's a woman, imagine the difference in personality between a black trouser suit, and one which is white. And what about the cut and expense of the suit?

If you're describing clothes which are threadbare and long forgotten by fashion, that creates a very different feel compared with a character who always wears the latest styles.

Then come the adornments to the outfit. Contrast a woman wearing

minimal jewellery versus one who drips with shining stones and gold.

And a basic difference with men – someone who wears a stripy tie as compared to a floral print. Which is more likely to be the lawyer, and which the architect?

Even headwear can give you an insight into a person. Imagine a character entering a scene walking from behind a wall, when initially all you can see of them is a hat.

If it's a baseball cap, worn back to front, what kind of person are you going to meet? Young, or old? A student or merchant banker? But what might you expect if the hat was a panama, or trilby?

The way a character walks can also be useful to a writer. My Tybalt strutted around the stage like a peacock, and what does that reveal about how confident a person he is? Compare it to someone who creeps about, always glancing around nervously, each step timidly taken.

Another joy with appearances is confounding expectations. Characters who take us by surprise are often the most interesting.

Don't do it too often as a writer, but what about the chief executive of an international company, worth billions of pounds, who wears jeans and a denim jacket?

Mark Zuckerberg, of Facebook, has been criticised for sporting similar-looking grey T-shirts every day, but whatever you think of his style choices, it's become a legendary part of a visionary and highly successful character. See also Apple founder Steve Jobs and his trademark jeans and black polo-neck... and not a tie in sight.

## Quirks

An oddity to a character's appearance or actions can be both memorable and effective in giving a strong sense of the person.

Quirks come in several forms, but perhaps the most commonly used is physical appearance.

Remember the lightning-shaped scar on Harry Potter's forehead? It tells you immediately there's something special about him, and works well with the magical theme of the books.

The famous quirk of appearance of Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* is a powerful way of demonstrating his

villainous nature, as is the black and inscrutable mask of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*. Both work by removing familiar features of humanity which we take for granted, and so bring a dark sense of evil.

Props are also useful quirks. Look at the whip used by Indiana Jones. It says immediately that he's a man of action, and far from a conventional one.

Sherlock Holmes' deerstalker also speaks volumes of a person who's eccentric to the core, and not in the least concerned about how people may perceive him, so comfortable is he in his own intellect and ways.

Something else to consider in helping to build up a sense of a character within seconds of meeting them is mannerisms.

Imagine a man who continually takes a memory stick out of his pocket to check it's there, and can't stop doing so. What's bothering him? What's on the stick that's so very important he can't bear not to see it every few seconds?

How about a man who continually bites his nails? How relaxed a person is he?

Or take a woman, sitting alone in a bar, time and again opening a compact to check her reflection and touch up her lipstick. Who's she waiting for? Is it a first date or a man she's been married to for years? How important a meeting is this to her? What does all that tell you about her home life, and whether she's content in herself or perhaps lonely?

Habits can also be helpful for an author in providing a sense of what a character is thinking.

Poirot likes to twirl his moustache when ruminating. In my TV Detective series of novels, Adam, the Chief Inspector, tightens his tie when he senses a breakthrough. It's a handy hint to readers that an important development is imminent.

Quirks should be used sparingly and not given to everyone who makes an appearance, as they can become clichéd. But used wisely they can greatly help a writer in making a powerful impact with a new character.

## Speech

It's a bit of a cheat, but worth mentioning because it can help to create an immediate sense of a character.

There are endless examples of what characters say giving a clear sense of the person they are. One of my favourite Sherlock Holmes quotations reveals a man who values logic and reasoning above all else:

*Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.'*

In the context of appearances, think carefully about the first words we hear from a character. Imagine the difference between a person who says, 'Wotcha dudes, how's it hanging?' compared to, 'Bidding you all a splendid good morning, and hoping the day is treating you most kindly.'

## A final trick

I have a fun trick for helping to construct characters which has the added advantage of getting an author away from the keyboard in a working, but enjoyable way.

If I'm struggling with making an imaginary person feel real, I sometimes head into town and scour the shops for clothes they would feel comfortable in. I even try shoes and accessories, too.

It's a helpful and entertaining way of creating a physical sense of a person, which then feeds into the rest of their personality.

You may not end up in a pantomime, as I did at Swanwick. But try finding a few items of clothing your character might wear, understand what it says about them, and you're making a strong start in giving the reader a sense of the person.

And that's well before we even hear a word about what they do for a living, their likes and dislikes, hobbies, aspirations, politics, beliefs and so much more of the business of characterisation. **V.M.**



Get in the mood for a Halloween tale, or just enjoy some classics from the genre, explored by **Helen M Walters**

**W**hat could be better than sitting around the fire on a dark Halloween night, swapping stories of ghosts, ghouls and demons? Ghost stories form part of a fine tradition of scaring ourselves to death and if you want to have a go at writing spooky tales, you can learn a lot from reading the greats. Some of the finest writers in the world have penned ghost stories, so I was spoilt for choice selecting stories for this article. In the end I went for three that all have something different to show us about the craft of writing a scary tale.

The stories I've chosen are *The Signalman* by Charles Dickens, *The Upper Berth* by F Marion Crawford, and *The Haunted Dolls' House* by MR James. As with my previous articles on classic short stories, you'll get most out of the article if you read the stories for yourself. To avoid spoilers, you might want to read them first (*see panel, opposite*).

Vital elements of a ghost story include setting and atmosphere, engaging human characters, a convincing ghostly presence, and an ending that makes you think. Let's look at them each in turn.

### Setting the scenes

*The Signalman*, as its title suggests, is set on a railway and this setting is

significant. There is something very claustrophobic about the cutting in which the signalman works, cut off from the rest of the world. We are told that little sunlight reaches this place and that it has a smell of death. The presence of the train is also significant. Its force and power are integral to the action, and the story is set in the relatively early days of the railway when the very idea of trains may still have been alien to some people.

It has a sense of foreboding from the start. The narrator looks down on the signalman from the embankment above, notices something odd in his demeanour and then is buffeted by the violent approach of an oncoming train. As the story goes on he refers repeatedly to an inescapable feeling of doom.

There is a nod in *The Upper Berth* to the tradition of oral storytelling. We are introduced to a character who, in turn, tells us he is going to tell us a story, and that it is a strange one. This story is also set in a claustrophobic atmosphere, this time on board a ship. Most of the action is not just restricted to the confines of the ship, but to the confines of one cabin. The claustrophobia is accentuated by the fact that the ship is crossing the Atlantic ocean. The characters are both enclosed, and in the middle of nowhere, at the same time.

In *The Haunted Dolls' House* our main character is haunted in his own home, in his own bedroom. That he is being assaulted by the supernatural in the one place he should have felt most safe, makes it even worse. We then have a setting within a setting, as most of the

action takes place within the doll's house as Mr Dillet looks on. Again there is something additionally sinister about the haunting being associated with a child's toy; something that should have connotations of innocence and safety.

The very title of this story tells us before we start that we are getting a ghostly tale. But we also have intimations of something sinister about the doll's house in dialogue between the man who sold it to Mr Dillet, and his wife. We learn that they are glad to see the back of it, and that the new owner should expect to find himself shaken up by it.

If you want your ghost story to get your readers' spines tingling right from the start, a creepy setting and building a spooky atmosphere will help. It doesn't have to be something obvious like a haunted house or a deserted graveyard. A mundane setting with something just slightly off-kilter about it can be just as chilling. Maybe it's a woodland where there's no birdsong, an urban area where there's no traffic noise or, as with the doll's house, something that should be safe unexpectedly not being so.

### Setting the tone

Use of light and darkness in your settings can also be effective. Dickens makes good use of the railway's ominously-named 'danger light' in his story. In *The Upper Berth* a lamp goes out at the highest point of drama and the haunted doll's house is surrounded by a supernatural light. Night falling, lights that should be on going out,



lights showing where there should be no light, all these can be used to great effect.

The characters we choose to narrate and populate our stories are also key to their success. In *The Signalman* we find out little about the narrator, and I suspect that is deliberate because it allows us to focus on the signalman himself. The narrator tells us that the signalman is educated, possibly above his station, and a vigilant man; perhaps to make the point that his belief in a sinister presence is not a result of being stupid or gullible.

In *The Upper Berth* we are introduced to the main character Brisbane through the eyes of the narrator. We learn straight away that he is physically strong and that he is a seasoned traveller and an intelligent man of the sort who would not be expected to believe in ghosts. This is borne out as the story goes on. Brisbane insists on seeking a rational explanation for the terrors he suffers, suggesting at one point that he may have eaten something that caused him to have nightmares rather than seeing a ghost.

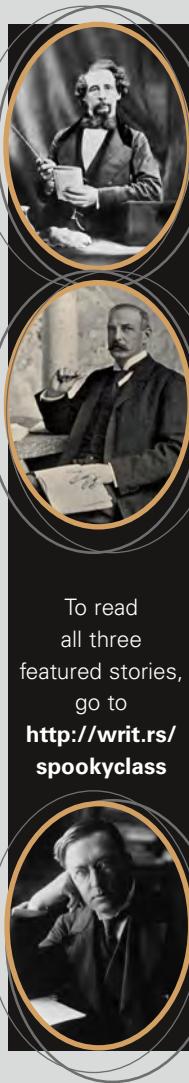
Mr Dillet in *The Haunted Doll's House* is presented as a man of business; a hard-headed man who strikes a good deal. Again, not someone we'd expect to be fanciful or likely to succumb to imagination. Just before he encounters his ghost he is described as feeling complacent. He is very soon to be shaken from that complacency.

It's important to get your human characters right as it is through their eyes that your reader will experience your ghost. By showing the fear your characters are experiencing, you can instil fear in your reader.

Think about your characters. Why are they susceptible to seeing ghosts? Is it something about their personality or something that has happened to them that makes them more likely to believe? Maybe you could make your story more interesting by having your main character absolutely determined that they don't believe in ghosts. I think that's quite a clever trick. The writer is saying: 'Look at this character. He is totally rational and doesn't believe in ghosts. But he's going to believe in the one I create.'

### Being creative

This leads us on to the ghosts themselves. In *The Signalman* the ghostly presence is elusive. At first the



To read all three featured stories, go to  
[http://writ.rs/  
spookyclass](http://writ.rs/spookyclass)

narrator suspects the signalman himself may be a spirit, but as the story goes on he realises this is not the case. Is there a poltergeist interfering with the bell in the signal box, though, or the red light at the entrance to the tunnel?

It becomes clear, as the signalman tells the narrator his troubles, that he is being haunted by an apparition in human form, which shows itself just before tragedies occur. The narrator tries to convince him there must be a rational explanation for his experiences and that their timing is down to mere coincidence, but to no avail. In the end, one of the most haunting things is the sheer torment of the signalman.

We first get an intimation of where the haunting resides in *The Upper Berth* when we are told that the steward looks visibly shocked that Brisbane has been allocated to cabin 105. It transpires, as Brisbane talks to other members of the crew, that the cabin in question is considered so doomed that he is begged not to sleep there. Suspicion of the cabin increases as he notes an inexplicable sense of cold and damp and realises that the porthole is regularly being opened without human agency. It deepens when he hears stories of its previous inhabitants ending up overboard and witnesses his own cabin mate fleeing for his life, never to be seen again.

There is an escalating sense of terror in the story as Brisbane comes closer and closer to actually encountering the ghost. When he does, the ghost turns out to be palpable. He can grab onto its wet, icy flesh and feel it slipping through his fingers. He can see it, he can feel it, and he can smell it.

In *The Haunted Doll's House* Mr Dillet is first aware of a ghostly presence when he reaches into the doll's house and feels that something is alive in there. The next thing that alerts him to danger is a clock striking one, and waking him, when he knows there is no clock in hearing distance.

His supernatural experience involves watching the characters in the doll's house come to life, and act out a murderous tragedy. He can see them and hear them but he doesn't interact with them. During this encounter the normal laws of nature are suspended. Mr Dillet is still in his bedroom, but rather than seeing his

familiar walls and ceiling he can see the night sky above the doll's house and he is able to see right into the doll's house without hindrance of walls or curtains. This inexplicability adds to the uneasy feel of the story.

Think about the nature of your ghost. Is it a poltergeist, an apparition, or a demon? Is it a malevolent ghost, or just a lost soul looking for peace? In the context of your story, what is more sinister – a ghost you can touch and feel, or one you can't? A ghost you can see, or one you can't?

### Meeting your end

Endings are important in all stories, and significantly in these stories the ending leaves something unanswered, or raises a new question.

*The Signalman* ends in tragedy with the signalman's own death – his uncanny premonitions having come true in the worst way possible. But in case that isn't enough, it has a spooky little extra twist at the end in which the narrator is stunned to hear words spoken that he thought existed only in his own head.

The search for rational explanations in *The Upper Berth* throws the supernatural happenings into sharp relief. Brisbane questions right to the end whether what he encountered was really a ghost, but has to concede that whatever it was, it was certainly dead.

At the end of *The Haunted Doll's House* Mr Dillet tracks down the real life origins of the story he saw re-enacted in the doll's house. Chillingly, he finds the graves of those involved, demonstrating that what he witnessed couldn't have been a fevered nightmare, but had to be something more sinister. Even more creepily, as he leaves the village where he has made these discoveries he hears the chiming of the very same clock that woke him in the night.

These endings leave the reader with a final sense of disquiet, which the spooky setting and the interaction between the human characters and the ghosts have been leading up to. A perturbing ending is the final piece of the jigsaw, so make sure you think carefully about it when you write your own stories.

Use all these ingredients and you'll be able to come up with a story to scare yourself, and your readers, stiff. **W.M.**

# Different times different places

Exploring infinite possibilities is the joy of novel-writing for *Cloud Atlas* and *Bone Clocks* author David Mitchell, he tells **Tina Jackson**

**D**avid Mitchell is the ideal novelist for the era, tapping into and giving voice to the concerns of an age where multiple worlds and systems of logic (online, offline, imaginary, possible) are interconnected.

Mitchell's genre-splicing works routinely twist worlds on their axis, compress past, present and future, cross multiple time periods and trip the reader from one realm of logic into another. From his first novel, 1999's *Ghostwritten*, to slipstream masterpieces 2004's *Cloud Atlas* (made into a major feature film in 2012) and last year's *Bone Clocks*, his books have been about expanding the possibilities of what a novelist can do and how he or she can do it.

'Isn't that what writers are and do – laboratories of the humanities, and how sciences impact on human experience?' asks David. He is enthusiastic, warmly engaged,

speaking fast as his mind races with ideas. 'Reading and writing are laboratories to explore the properties of the human condition: jealousy or love or love or lust or greed? The top twenty things we see and feel in the course of an everyday life.'

The novel is a fantastic form. It's nearly infinite, you can do what you want with it, new ways to utilise it come along. It's so adaptable and generous, and nearly infinite in what it can do – isn't it kind of obvious that if you're not an astro-physicist, and you want to think about time and what it does, isn't the novel the perfect form to explore that?'

David's 'laboratory' involves complex ideas and narrative schemes:

his books are, largely, long. His last one, *The Bone Clocks*, was similar in structure to the epic *Cloud Atlas*: 600-plus pages of linked narratives travelling in time from the past to the future. His next book, *Slade*

*House*, which is published at the end of this month, though, is a short novel that first saw life as *The Right Sort*, a story told on Twitter at the beginning of this year. But as fiction mirrors life, *Slade House*'s genesis was in an earlier time period, as part of the planning for *The Bone Clocks*, which follows a woman called Holly from her teenage years in 1980s Kent to her old age in a future dystopia on the coast of Ireland as the world's resources are running out. 'When

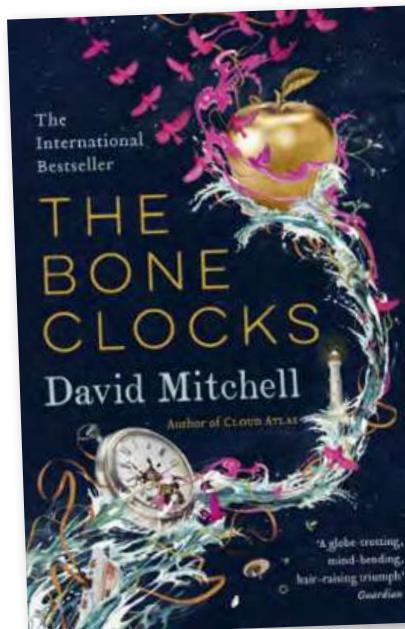
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As a reader, your assumptions are being played like a fiddle, so you view the reader's most likely assumptions as material that you can bend and twist.”

I was thinking about *The Bone Clocks*, I thought it could be seventy short stories, one for each year of Holly's life, and each one linking to each other.'

This experiment was too ambitious even for David. 'It sounds like a good idea in theory but it's actually impossible to do because we read short stories differently from novels – you can't read every detail perfectly in a 600-page page-turner.' He jettisoned that idea, but another one – the idea of a house that could be revisited – refused to let go, and found expression in micro-fiction. 'When I was thinking of how I could use Twitter as a valid literary experiment, I already had the first part, which I rewrote into Twitterese as *The Right Sort*', he says. 'But it raised more questions than it was answering, and so before I got my teeth stuck into my next meaty 600-pager, I thought it would be interesting to write *Slade House* and explore some questions.' *The Right Sort* went back into ordinary text as the first section of *Slade House*: 'I wasn't constrained by the 140-word character limit!'

*Slade House* has all the hallmarks of a David Mitchell story: linked narratives; different time periods; accumulating histories. But it is also an edgy contemporary retelling of that most classic of stories: a haunted house tale.

David laughs. 'How can you write a ghost story without the ghosts of MR James, Dickens, Poe, *The Turn of the Screw*? The ghosts of these stories are rattling their chains.' His version reinvents the genre for a wired, pop-culture-savvy readership, but nonetheless, its bones are the rattling skeleton of a spook story. 'Your choices are to work in the neighbourhoods of a genre or invent your genre, or try to be genreless,' says David. 'It makes more sense to be cognisant of the tradition –



  
Click here to listen to an extract of *Cloud Atlas*, or buy the book from Audible

allusions are the stuff of life, and literature. You can't help it, can you? And it is the how and not the what – I did the best I could.'

Different pieces of writing do different things, he says. His satisfaction as a writer is in understanding the craft demanded by the genre – and then putting his own spin on it. 'Ghost stories are a puzzle – not so much "whodunit" as "who is it?" To put in a rats' maze of blind alleys and cul de sacs and loops. It's a pleasure to craft – and I suppose it is a craft – and to be in. I love the way (Henry) James never comes down off the fence.'

Readers of David Mitchell's work will be familiar with the narrative tripwires that plunge the reader from one scenario into something wildly unexpected. 'Tripping up?' Another laugh. 'I only do it because I love it when it's done to me. Isn't it great, when you're outwitted? It's a childish narrative pleasure in being outfoxed.' What the reader isn't looking for allows David to set his traps. 'As a reader, your assumptions are being played like a fiddle, so you view the reader's most likely assumptions as material that you can bend and twist.' This most thoughtful, intelligent, articulate novelist guffaws like a pantomime villain: 'Muwhahahahahah.'

'There are equivalents in optics,' he continues, straight-faced again. 'A conjuror's trick. I was talking to Neil Gaiman about this misdirection – whatever was on stage before the conjuror came on can't be a prop, and the writer's equivalent is, before the terms of the story are made clear, that's a grace period where you can put things in that the reader won't spot. If it's successful then you can learn a few tricks, and apply them as successfully as you can.'

Another characteristic of David's writing is the way he uses novella-

length blocks of narrative to build an over-arching story. 'It's short novellas for me, 50-60 pages. I like that form – it's long enough to build a decent momentum, accumulate a decent speed and end with an impressive crash – but you can't commit the crime of being boring. I realised rather embarrassingly, years ago, that I was a novella writer, not a novelist, but I could link them, and build them like Lego. Or Duplo – it's bigger.'

Another hallmark of his body of work is the way his characters recur, at different times and sometimes, in different incarnations. One of these is Marinus, who is male in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Groot*, and female in *The Bone Clocks*. 'She's a favourite – she's sort of potentially inexhaustible. I could spend my life and ten more books writing about his/her meta-life,' says David. 'She's an accidental discovery but I can see the potential she has. Maybe Marinus is my most inexhaustible character.'

There is nothing accidental about David's recurring tropes and characters. 'When I started out, that was my plan – to be a builder of, and a returner of and expander of this world,' he describes. 'It's where I live. It's home. I want all my novels to be standalones, and thoroughly enjoyable for a reader who has never, and will never, read another book by me. But if someone is kind enough to read more than one, there are echoes and resonances and wormholes into other things I've written. I hope they'll acquire a resonance, like something dimly remembered or misremembered.'

David's books slip between and reference genres but he regards himself most of all as a 'plot and characters' writer. 'All genres need plots and characters otherwise it's not fiction – and fiction is what I do. I start with characters – I'm a bit evasive about plot and genre and it isn't my job to think about what genre I'm in.' Many of his books feature a young, pre-adult character. 'Your own teenage years are where many of the basics of you as a writer first come online – but you're not really thinking about the world very analytically so our teenage years are the beginning of us. They're the square one of the adult you – so

it makes sense that they crop up in people's novels,' he says. 'Holly in *The Bone Clocks* is about how we aren't just who we are now or who we will come to be – we are complicated beings existing through time, existing all the way though 'til the end of us when we die and even after that. All of those selves are our self. With Holly, I wanted a compound Holly that mirrors the compound stuff I have described.'

The futuristic element in his books comes from scientific possibility, not unexplained causes. 'I do try to swerve away from magic or exploring cause and effect by a process of fantasy. It's too easy. I try to say, it's not violating the laws of physics, I'm merely pointing out that are other, deeper words of physics that *Bone Clocks*

' are obeying.' *The Bone Clocks* has been shortlisted for The World Fantasy Awards. 'My view of fantasy is split into two worlds,' says David. 'Harry Potter and *Lord of the Rings* work because of magic, but for me, I want that techier side of fantasy whereby "psychoteria" is a science, it would have objectives and measurable

criteria, it's just that its laws haven't been discovered yet.'

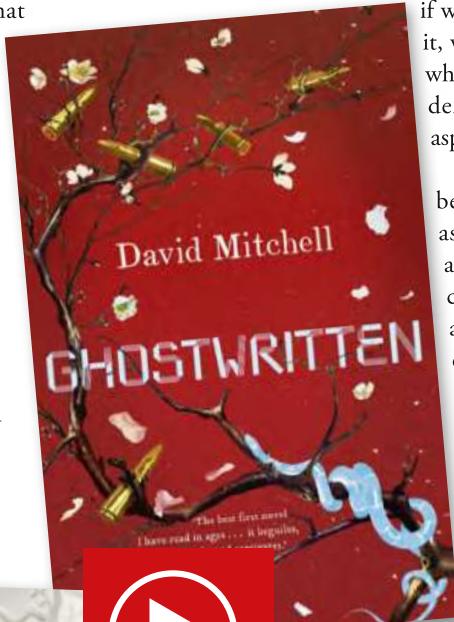
The main difference between researching and writing the past and the present is, he says, that writing about the past means you can be 'wrong as well as bad'. But he insists that a writer has to know about everything he or she writes about, even if it doesn't exist. 'In the future, you can merely be bad. Of course it's more research-intense. You have to know the terms of the world – in the past the ways of satisfying basic or complicated human needs were known and in the future we don't know – but (as a writer) you have to know. Even if we don't show it or design it, we have to have an idea of what it is in the future: politics, demographics, human aspirations.'

David writes what he writes because it reflects his life as a reader. 'My interests as a writer are umbilically connected with my interests as a reader – a novel is a crisis, a bubble of reality, a Narnia you can go into through the magic bubble of the book – it's beautiful, ultimate, wonderful escapism. That's what I love

as a reader so it's what I want to do as a writer. The themes aren't that up to you – they muscle their way in, and most of my novels are about predacity, predation, power, cause and effect, what makes things happen.'

The complexity of ideas and story strands in David Mitchell's work is offset by their vivid, immediately readable blend of high art and pop culture. His beautifully crafted sentences leap off the page, and often with humour, draw the reader into what's most vital: the story. 'It's important readers can read me!' David exclaims. 'I can't be doing with books that are deliberately obtuse and try to impress me with the writer's vocabulary. That principle goes throughout. You can celebrate language by occasionally bringing writing to attention, but page after page? You don't want to read that! If a novel is an arena for boastfulness, count me out. I love writing. I want to do it professionally for as long as I can, and that narrative world would come off the rails if I ignored what I like. If you think, who your own favourite novelists are, whose MSs would you run into a burning building to save? Chekhov, Tolstoy, Ursula le Guin, Salinger – these people don't show off. They use the regular vocabulary of their age – they're kind and compassionate and sane and as wise as they're able to be. If it's good enough for Chekhov, it's good enough for me. **Wm**

**“You can celebrate language by occasionally bringing writing to attention, but page after page? You don't want to read that!”**



Click here to listen to an extract of *Ghostwritten*, or buy the book from Audible



#### DAVID MITCHELL HAS BEEN:

- Awarded the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (for the best work of literature by an author under 35) for his first novel, 1999's *Ghostwritten*.
- Selected in 2003 as one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists.
- Shortlisted twice for the Booker Prize, for *Number 9 Dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and longlisted in 2014 for *The Bone Clocks*.
- Listed as one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time* magazine in 2007.



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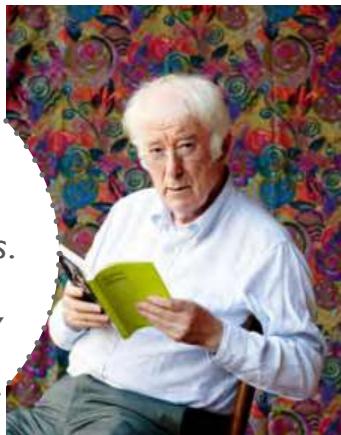
# On writing

**Tony Rossiter** explores great words from great writers

“ ”

Writers have to start out as readers.

SEAMUS HEANEY



We all start out as readers, don't we? First, it's picture books read to us by mum or dad or teacher. Then we begin to recognise sounds and letters and words, and to take the first steps towards becoming a reader. Many of us got the reading bug when we were young, and books read in childhood can stay with us for ever. Not all readers become writers, but there are plenty of authors who were inspired to write by what they read when they were growing up.

Reading is often the first piece of advice any aspiring writer is given. It's not exactly rocket science. If you want to become a published author, it's a pretty good idea to take a look at what's been published in the past – and to see what's being published now.

First, read the kind of stuff you yourself want to write. Whatever that is – romance, crime, sci-fi, thrillers, memoirs, sagas, fantasy, non-fiction... you name it – it's sensible to see what's already out there and to immerse yourself in the best of it.

Secondly, leave your comfort zone behind and take a look at what's being written outside your own genre. The more widely you read, the more you'll learn. Style and structure are crafts that can be learned. See how others do it and find out what works for you – and what doesn't. Learn how successful authors hook their readers and keep them turning the pages.

Finally, don't ignore the everyday stuff you can't get away from: newspapers and magazines, TV advertisements, websites, social media and so on. As a writer, you need to use words effectively; to make every word count. If you filter out the rubbish, but take on board the good stuff – words or phrases, or ways of using words, that strike a chord with you – you may come across something you can adapt for use in your own writing. It's all grist to the mill.

Reading is a win-win activity. On the one hand, you can derive sheer enjoyment from it. There are few things as satisfying as burying yourself deep in the pages of a book you can hardly bear to put down. On the other hand, you can almost always learn something, either consciously or subconsciously, about writing.

# How I got published



**David Hofmeyr**, whose debut YA novel *Stone Rider* is published by Penguin, shares his path to publication

“We are not interested in science fiction which deals with negative utopias. They do not sell.”

‘Stephen King received this letter about his first published novel, *Carrie*. It was rejected so many times that King collected the letters on a spike. When the paperback version was released in 1974, it sold over a million copies in twelve months. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling (in case you were wondering) was rejected twelve times and Rowling told not to quit her day job. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, twenty times. *Dune* by Frank Herbert, 23 times. I'm not saying I'm in the same league, but if a large number of rejections are a base-level requirement, then throw me into the mix.

‘My name's David Hofmeyr and I am the author of *Stone Rider*, a book that was rejected numerous times. An agent I won't name said: “Could use development. There's no way I could sell a dystopian project... as a debut.”

‘*Stone Rider* (my debut) has now been sold in over ten markets and the film rights have been sold to Working Title, with a script in production. This, thanks to my new agent, the lovely and gifted Stephanie Thwaites of Curtis Brown, and the vision of Ben Horslen, the commissioning editor at Puffin and Beverly Horowitz, Random House US.

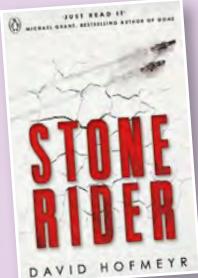
‘Stephanie, Ben and Beverly are no wiser than everyone else (OK, that's a lie... they really, really are!) they simply saw a spark. Rejection can be tough. It can also be a tonic. In my case, it drove me forward, trained me to be more determined and courageous. Well... more determined.

‘*Stone Rider* is my debut novel, but I'd written two books before this. Both failed to make the cut. Some rejections were harsh and brief. Other kind, but infuriating. Like this one for a story I wrote about a dying boy and his talking dog. “It was a script we discussed at length and passed around our editorial team because there are some lovely elements to your storytelling. Unfortunately I don't think it's quite right for us. But we loved the story.”

‘I'm thankful for every one of these (okay, not every one). They pushed me to pursue my dream relentlessly.

‘I took up an MA in writing for young people at Bath Spa University, run by Julia Green and Steve Voake, and it was here that *Stone Rider* was born.

‘Write about what you love and it will sell. And if it doesn't, at first, then you're in for a hell of a ride anyway.'



Website: [www.davidhofmeyr.com](http://www.davidhofmeyr.com)

Interview by Dolores Gordon-Smith

# Editorial calendar

Strong forward planning will greatly improve your chances with freelance submissions.  
Here are some themes to consider for the coming months.

**10 February**

It's ten years since Britain's biggest-ever cash heist, the £53m Securitas depot robbery, in Tonbridge, Kent.



**11 February**

Sixty years ago, in 1956, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, members of the Cambridge Spy Ring, announced they had defected to the Soviet Union.

**20 February**

200 years ago, in 1816, Rossini's classic comic opera *The Barber of Seville* premiered – and flopped – in Rome.



**26 February**

The first of thousands of sightings of mysterious 'ghost rockets' in Finland and Sweden were first observed in 1946, seventy years ago.

**10 February**

Twenty years ago, in 1996, chess Grandmaster Garry Kasparov was beaten in game one of a six-game match by an IBM computer Deep Blue (Kasparov won three games and drew two).



**16 February**

Seventy years ago, in 1946, actor Ian Lavender, best known as Private Pike and the last surviving member of the Dad's Army cast, was born.



**18 February**

Queen Mary I of England, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII, also known as Bloody Mary, was born 500 years ago, in 1516.



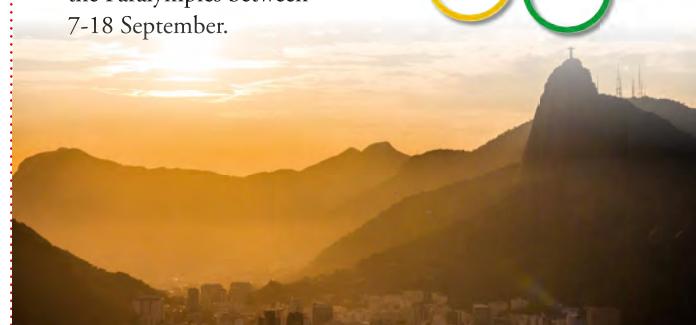
**29 February**

2016 is a leap year.



*Looking ahead:*

The Olympic Games will be held in Rio de Janeiro from 5 to 21 August, and the Paralympics between 7-18 September.





Misinformation about the ebook marketplace is everywhere, but with clear understanding and goals you *can* do it yourself.

Troubador Publishing's ebook programme manager **Rachel Gregory** addresses some of the most common misconceptions

**T**here are many options available to authors when it comes to self-publishing an ebook. The decisions you make will depend on a variety of factors, from the level of involvement you want to have in its creation to the range of distribution channels through which you would like the finished product to be available. These choices need to be made at the beginning of the publishing process. In this article, we'll work through some of the most common misconceptions about publishing an ebook.

#### **Misconception 1** It's quick and easy to produce a good 'DIY' ebook.

Ebooks are sometimes seen as a quick, cost-effective and low-risk way to publish. In my experience, they can be all of these things – as long as an author makes it their responsibility to understand the basics of ebooks and ebook formatting before they begin. Do you have an e-reader? Do you regularly read ebooks? If so, you'll already be aware of some of the pitfalls to avoid when you produce your own ebook. If not, now is the time to get familiar with the format.

Do your research – learn about the various retailers and how their upload specifications differ, and the different formats and methods that are appropriate for the conversion of specific types of manuscripts. For example, picture books have to be converted using a different process to that used for straightforward novels and they can't be made available across all devices. If you want your ebook to be a success – to be read beyond your immediate friends and family and to be seriously considered in the retail and library markets – you need to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses as an ebook producer, from the outset.

Do you know how to convert your document to ebook format? It is possible to produce an ebook relatively easily, using a template cover and an automatic conversion tool. Some ebook retailers offer tools that convert Word documents straight to epub files, providing you

can format the manuscript according to their stringent guidelines. Others offer to create more design-heavy files in a proprietary format. These options might appeal to you but there are other choices available. Consider researching conversion houses and publishers who specialise in producing professional ebooks that can be read on all devices. While these services may not be free, you will often achieve a better-quality ebook file this way, which you will own and can upload across multiple sites, rather than being restricted to selling through just one retailer. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are selling a high-quality product that downloads correctly onto devices. In a saturated market, anything less than the best is unlikely to break into the bestseller lists and a substandard ebook will either be ignored or attract negative reviews.

It is essential not to underestimate the importance of quality in the ebook market. Reviewers will be critical. If you forego a professional edit or well-managed conversion process and are then criticised because there are errors in the final product, this will inevitably impact on your customer rating and therefore your discoverability, which could adversely affect sales. Similarly, if your cover design is amateurish, it will be noticed for the wrong reasons. If you or a friend can produce a cover design which is prepared to the correct specification and you honestly feel it is of a comparative standard to those that you see on traditionally published books and ebooks, then you might wish to create the cover art yourself. Otherwise, you can hire a designer – preferably one with experience of producing ebook covers that work well when viewed at thumbnail image size.

**TIP:** If you're determined to go 'DIY', do it well. Become an expert in the field; research the best methods and potential pitfalls. Teach yourself the difference between reflowable and fixed format files, as well as the benefits and limitations of each file type. Most importantly, employ professionals to help you with any aspects that you are unsure about.

## Misconception 2

### You don't need to publish anywhere other than Kindle.

Explore the distribution options that are available to you. Amazon holds the largest share of the ebook market, but it isn't the only retailer. KDP Select, Amazon's digital self-publishing platform, demands exclusivity from authors. Not everybody has a Kindle or wants to use the Kindle app. Apple iBooks is the second largest ebook store and its interface is easy to use. People with an Android phone might prefer to buy directly from Google Play, another of the expanding retailers. What about Kobo, OverDrive or subscription services like Scribd and Oyster? Would you like your ebook to be available in libraries? The more widely available your ebook is, the larger your audience.

Many retailers and libraries are only accessible to publishers who have signed a contract with them or with their suppliers. Even uploading your file directly to the retailers that will allow you to do so, can be time consuming. For these reasons among others, it can be beneficial to ask a company to deal with the distribution for you. They are likely to have access to an expansive catalogue of retailers. They might handle the reformatting of the files for you (different retailers have varying upload specifications). They would also assign an ISBN and let retailers know when your ebook is expected to be available for sale. Additionally, they would be among the first to hear about any new market opportunities that arise.

Larger retailers have merchandising teams who are dedicated to selling a greater number of ebooks. They do this by entering titles into topical and ongoing promotions, as well as allowing some authors to purchase advertising space on their sites. There is a healthy level of competition among the smaller retailers, which is promising news for authors who are looking to get more coverage for their titles. Again, these merchandising opportunities are usually limited to authors publishing through a company that has forged a relationship with the merchandisers, but it can be a great way to generate some extra sales.

## EBOOK FORMAT BASICS

Most ebooks are reflowable files. The text readjusts and 'flows' to fill the screen; the screen display varies depending on a number of user-defined factors including the font size and style that the ebook is being viewed at, as well as the e-reader or application that is used. For this reason, ebook formatting can be limited. Fixed format files (sometimes referred to as 'fixed layout') are more complicated to produce, but are the only way to ensure that specific content is fixed in place. This is the most appropriate type of conversion for a picture book or a manuscript containing text that wraps around images, or that contains lots of graphs. Fixed format files are designed for a specific device such as the iPad or the Kindle Fire tablet, rather than being suitable for a wide range of e-readers. They are more expensive to produce than standard, reflowable ebooks but they can look very impressive.

**TIP:** Research the distribution options that are available to you. There is nothing wrong with publishing through KDP Select if you are sure you only want your ebook to be available on Amazon, but it makes sense to investigate all avenues before making a decision.

## Misconception 3

### You should make your ebook free or very cheap in order to be successful.

With optimal price points constantly changing, it can be hard to know how to price an ebook to give it the best chance of selling. In some cases, making an ebook available for free or 99p can boost sales initially, but this does not usually translate to an author making more money in the long term. There will always be readers who are tempted by a cheap offer or a freebie but on the whole, the ebook market has evolved. Temporary price drops can be a great way of generating renewed interest in a title or enticing customers towards your backlist or other titles in a series, but that is very different from pricing it at a permanently low price point. You'll receive around 40p per sale – at best – and this approximation doesn't factor in exchange rates or delivery charges. Authors are now paid a royalty based on the list price less VAT. How many copies would you need to sell to see any kind of return? Be careful not to devalue your work.

## DRM OR NOT?

Digital Rights Management (DRM) is a file protection device that is applied to ebook files by retailers at the point of sale. It goes some way towards protecting a file from piracy. Whether or not you want this applied to your files is a personal choice – some authors would rather their ebooks were unprotected. Most retailers will allow you to remove this option, others apply it as standard, and you will need to pay to set up a DRM-application system if you want to sell protected files directly from your webpage. Until recently, selling ebooks directly was a trend. Now, most sellers realise that customers tend to buy a title on their device, directly from the ebook store that it is associated with; direct sales are declining in popularity. However, there is no ‘one size fits all’ distribution solution; it is important that your solution works best for you, the individual. If your ebook is a business book for example, and it ties in closely with your company site, it may make sense to sell the ebook directly. Direct sales also eliminate the retailers’ slice of your income.

On average, ebook prices have increased in the last year, and that is not just as a result of the newly introduced European VAT legislation, which passes country specific taxes to the customer. From what I have seen so far, rather than deterring consumers, the slightly higher prices seem to have produced a more discerning customer base that relies increasingly heavily on recommendations and samples, rather than simply basing their buying decisions on a title’s low price tag.

**TIP:** Ultimately, pricing is your decision; some authors are keen to get the word out there and are prepared to sell a larger volume of copies for a smaller return. Is your aim to sell a larger amount of copies or to make more money in royalties? This is a decision that you need to make before you set your price. Ebook pricing is fluid and largely down to author experimentation though, so you can always try selling it at several different prices and see which one works best.

**Misconception 4**  
**Providing it's good enough, readers will hear about your ebook through word of mouth.**  
There is an important place for a marketing campaign. Word of mouth can be a great publicity tool but it needs to be cultivated. Self-

published authors need to be shrewd ‘authorpreneurs’ and treat their ebook like a business. In a market where potential punters are inundated with new titles, what will make customers wade through the hype about all of the other ebooks and locate yours? How do you gather reviews and positive feedback?

There is so much you can do yourself, even on a budget. Social media is a great way to let people know about a new release – as long as you keep it varied. Try not to bombard your followers by giving them the hard sell. Show off your flair for writing! Pique their interest with every post. You, the author, are your unique brand and selling this well can be just as beneficial as publicising what you have written. Readers want to get to know the author of an ebook they enjoy. Encourage your readers to leave reviews.

Make the most of your fan base. If you have an existing backlist or other titles in a series, organising a limited-time price drop of these titles to coincide with your new release can generate renewed interest in them. Some retailers will connect all of your ebooks, at least through recommendations. Amazon’s Author Central – where you can upload author information to Amazon’s pages – is a great way for an author to link to all of their publications in the same place.

Price promotions can be particularly useful when combined with relevant news items or public holidays. You can either coordinate these promotions yourself or use a site such as [www.bookbub.com](http://www.bookbub.com), where you can pay them to promote your reduced ebook to their followers. There are other promotional sites that you can tag in your posts on Twitter and they will sometimes re-tweet; there are also bloggers who will promote your ebook in exchange for a free download on NetGalley (a great site for making a DRM-protected copy [see boxed text] of your ebook available for free to reviewers, bloggers and librarians). Online writers’ groups and forums will give recommendations about reviewers to contact and the blog sites that are most likely to feature your ebook.

**TIP** If you are able to commit the time and energy to marketing your ebook yourself, there is a lot that you can do. If you can’t spare the time or don’t feel confident, there are numerous sites and companies that can help you with your marketing campaign.

## Misconception 5 Ebooks are dying out.

The buzz that surrounded ebooks two years ago has abated somewhat, but that doesn’t mean sales are declining. The fact that fewer e-readers are being sold doesn’t mean ebooks are rapidly becoming less popular – it just means that people aren’t updating their devices regularly and that they might be reading on other, multi-functional devices. Remember too, that readers may share a device but they could each buy their own ebooks to read on it. ‘Millennials prefer print’ is a popular headline among those who are predicting the demise of ebooks. I don’t think this is indicative of a real threat to digital publishing. Data has long since shown that less than a quarter of people in the western world solely buy ebooks instead of print and that of these, the group that buys a targeted e-reader is predominantly middle-aged and female; others prefer to read on smartphone apps or tablets. Personally, I am pleased that a customer base has emerged that likes to read in both print and digital formats.

A section of the market that is showing a sustained interest in digital publishing is the library sector. Interestingly, libraries are starting to stock a lot more ebooks. Crucially, they are putting their buying decisions down to increased demand from patrons, claiming to have seen a huge upsurge in ebook popularity in the last six months alone. For the lending sector at least, this is just the beginning...

While there are many misconceptions about ebooks, a small amount of research will give you a clear idea of the best way to convert, sell and market your work. Publishing an ebook should be a fun experience; I hope the above tips will give you the confidence that you can make the right choices when approaching digital self-publishing. **W**

**Rachel Gregory**  
is the ebook programme manager at Troubadour Publishing, home to the respected Matador self-publishing imprint. She manages the ebook department, producing and merchandising ebooks across all markets



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## *The techniques and tricks of*

# LEE CHILD

**Tony Rossiter** looks at a writer who finds the ending of a Jack Reacher thriller just as exciting as the reader



not unusual for some little old lady to come up to him and say: 'You're a nice tall chap, could you reach me that can?' That's how Lee Child, to give him the name by which millions of readers know him, came upon the name of his hero, Jack Reacher.

He's written nineteen thrillers (by the time this article appears in print his twentieth, *Make Me*, will have been published) and over a dozen short stories about former military policeman Jack Reacher, a tough guy with universal appeal. Every one of them has been a phenomenal bestseller. It's claimed that a Jack Reacher novel is bought every four seconds somewhere in the world.

### HOW HE BEGAN

He's always been a voracious reader. The first books he read were children's adventure and mystery stories, such as Enid Blyton's the Famous Five and the Secret Seven. After that it was the Biggles war stories of Captain WE Johns. Then he moved on to Alistair

'**H**ey, if this writing thing doesn't pan out, you could always be a reacher in a supermarket,' said Jim Grant's wife. He's well over six feet tall, and when they're out shopping in the supermarket it's

Maclean, Raymond Chandler and John D Macdonald.

He enjoyed acting in school plays and as a teenager had holiday jobs working backstage in small theatres and arts centres. In 1977, after taking a law degree at Sheffield University, he joined Granada Television. He stayed there until 1995, working on iconic series such as *Brideshead Revisited*, *Jewel in the Crown*, *Prime Suspect*, and *Cracker*. Then, at the age of forty, he was sacked – the result of corporate restructuring. He's described his Jack Reacher novels as revenge stories driven by his anger at the downsizing at Granada. Losing his job gave him the stimulus to write thrillers with a hero whose main motivation is revenge: someone does a very bad thing, and Reacher takes revenge.

For about four or five years before he began writing, it had been dawning on him that he might be able to write a book, and he began to understand how other writers did it. In terms of storytelling his greatest influence, he has said, was Macdonald's series of crime stories about Travis McGee, a 'salvage consultant' who recovers others' property for a fee. The first Jack Reacher novel, *Killing Floor* (1997), was written in longhand on his dining-room table. He did not own a computer and wanted to wait to buy one with his first advance, which he did.

### JACK REACHER

Jack Reacher is an ex-military cop, a former major in the US Army. He's a drifter without roots – a wanderer, alienated from the establishment he was once part of, who has a strong sense of justice. He's a modern manifestation of the heroic-altruism tradition in English crime fiction exemplified by Leslie Charteris' Simon 'The Saint' Templar. Like many traditional heroes, he sees it as his job to right wrongs and to defend the weak against the forces of evil and oppression. He's like a gun-slinging hero of the Wild West: the mysterious stranger who comes into town, cleans things up, gives the baddies their just deserts, and then moves on.

Reacher is good at violence. He has the mental and physical attributes both to dish it out and take it, and he doesn't hesitate to use them. He's a very big man, 6 feet 5 inches tall, with a 50-inch chest. A small arms expert, he's an outstanding practitioner of both man-portable weaponry and hand-to-hand combat. Head-butting seems to be a particular skill. He has no qualms at all about killing those who deserve it, but it's never done gratuitously. Child does not skimp on his descriptions of Reacher's violence: *Smashed the boss man's balls like I was trying to punt a football right out of the stadium... I jammed my thumb into his eye. Hooked the tips of my fingers in his ear and squeezed.* There are plenty of passages more graphic than that.

Asked how he came to create Reacher's character, Lee Child said: 'I didn't want another drunk, alcoholic, miserable, traumatised hero. I didn't want him to have shot a kid, or his partner, or whatever. I just wanted a decent, normal, uncomplicated guy... I wanted a happy-go-lucky guy. He has quirks and problems, but the thing is, he doesn't know he's got them. Hence, no tedious self-pity. He's smart and strong, an introvert, but any anguish he suffers is caused by others.'

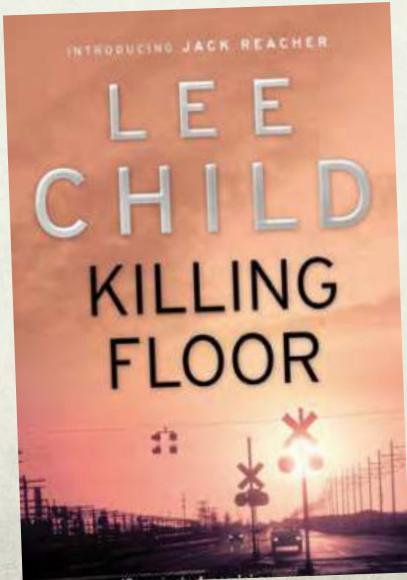
### HOW HE WRITES

Jim Grant is English, but he deliberately chose to write American-style thrillers. He had visited the US frequently and lapped up American TV. 'It was really a question of mimicking,' he says. 'If you're familiar

with the rhythms and the word choices of the country and you can put them down on paper, it actually becomes their nationality.' In 1998, after the publication of his first book, he moved with his American wife and his daughter to New York. His wife Jane reads his drafts and takes out any 'Britishisms.'

He gets up late and typically writes from noon until around 6pm, chain-smoking and drinking cup after cup of coffee, aiming to produce 2,000 words a day. He has two computers – one just for writing, the other for checking emails and baseball scores. Since 1997 he has written a book a year. He always starts on 1 September, the date on which, having been sacked from his job in television, he went out and bought the paper and pencil (and a pencil sharpener) with which he would write his first Jack Reacher novel. Each book takes him about six months to write; every year he submits the completed manuscript to his publisher in March.

Child begins writing without too much forethought; he has neither a title nor a plot – just a glimmer of what's to come. He does not construct outlines, but begins simply by picturing the climax scene towards which the story will build. 'Then I just start somewhere and let the story work itself out,' he says. He likes his writing to be organic, spontaneous and authentic. Unlike many writers, he does not revise endlessly: 'Not quite "don't get it right, get it written", but close,' he has said.

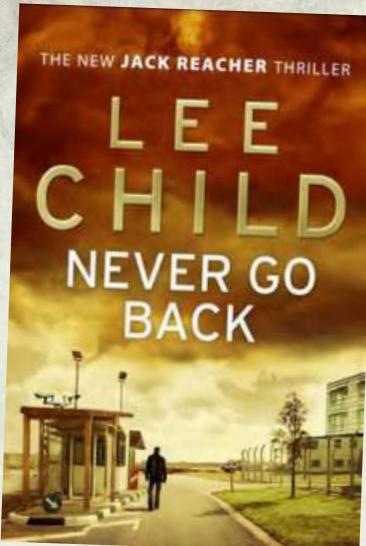


Child's prose style has been described as 'hardboiled' and 'commercial.' He believes his experience of television drama has helped him to write authentic dialogue. Some Reacher novels are written in the first person, and some in the third. Here's how *Killing Floor* begins: *I was arrested in Eno's diner. At twelve o'clock. I was eating eggs and drinking coffee. A late breakfast, not lunch. I was wet and tired after a long walk in heavy rain. All the way from the highway to the edge of town.*

Note the very short, staccato sentences, often without verbs. 'Genre fiction at its most basic,' said one critic, who added 'They're exciting. You can't put them down.' Marilyn Stasio of *The New York Times* said, 'His words are spare, but well chosen; the action is violent, but well calculated; and the ingenuity of the plot is especially well suited to a cool character like Reacher, who always thinks before he strikes.'

He believes there are three key elements in a story: character, suspense and education. In the plot versus character debate, he's firmly on the side of character. 'Character is, always and forever, the essential primary driver,' he says. That may come as a surprise from a writer whose action-packed stories seem intricately plotted, but if you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. We buy into characters, not plots. Think of Miss Marple, Poirot, Maigret, Rebus, Dalglish, Morse, Wexford, and all the other heroes of popular crime novels. How many of the plots can you remember? It's always the central character that draws us in and sticks in the mind, not the plot. Child does not believe that his central character needs to grow and develop: 'I prefer other characters around Jack to change and learn and grow... I'll leave Jack as he is.' He believes that readers know what to expect from his novels, and that the consistency of Jack Reacher as a character gives them confidence to stay with him and to continue buying the books.

His second key element is suspense. He's convinced that raising questions



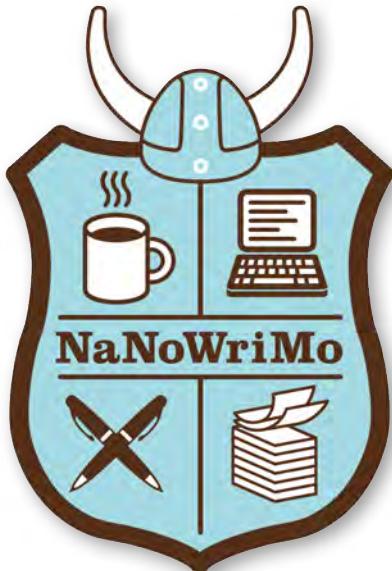
and answering them is the way to create suspense. He believes there's something fundamental in human nature that makes us want to endlessly raise and, most importantly, find answers to questions. So he builds suspense by raising and answering questions. Let me give you a couple of examples.

We learn in the first sentence of *Killing Floor* that Jack Reacher has been arrested. So the obvious first question is: Why? In the second chapter, we learn that Reacher is being charged with murder. Again, the question is: Why? And so it goes on, one question after another. To take another example, *Never Go Back* begins with Reacher being attacked by two strangers outside a motel (needless to say, he has no difficulty dealing with them). So the obvious first question is: Why is he attacked? When he visits the headquarters of his old unit in Washington DC, wanting to meet the new commanding officer, Major Susan Turner (because he liked her voice on the phone), he finds that the officer sitting behind his old desk is not Susan Turner. So where is she? Why is she not there? What has happened to her? And so it goes on: a succession of questions raised and answered as the story develops.

There are small questions that may span a paragraph or two, bigger questions that span a chapter or a couple of chapters, and really big questions that are answered only towards the end of the book. 'For me the end of a book is just as exciting as it is for a reader,' he says. He believes a good book should leave its readers knowing more about life than when they began. Hence his third key element – education.

Lee Child believes that reading is the only essential training for a writer and does not have much time for most of the advice routinely given to new writers. For example, he does not subscribe to the 'show, don't tell' principle. 'We're not story showers,' he says. 'We're story tellers.'

'There is nothing wrong with just telling the story. So liberate yourself from that rule.' **WA**



# A NOVEL in a month

The annual NaNoWriMo challenge is about a lot more than just getting 50,000 words on the page, says **Steven Chapman**

**N**ovel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo for short) celebrates its sixteenth birthday this year, which means it's been around long enough for most people to have developed feelings for it – one way or another. Launched in 1999 by Chris Baty with just 21 participants, NaNoWriMo has grown considerably over the years. Now hundreds of thousands of writers take part each November, all pledging to write 50,000 words in thirty days. But there are also those who reject NaNoWriMo as an amateur and futile event, insisting it is not 'true' writing. To those people I say you're missing the point. Writers write – pure and simple. NaNoWriMo gives you a chance to ignore your inner editor and let your creativity run wild! There's plenty of time to edit once November is over.

NaNoWriMo is a marathon as well as a sprint – relatively short bursts of intensive work that leave participants gasping for breath and

sighing with relief as each day draws to a close. For some, 1,667 words a day doesn't require much alteration to their normal writing schedule, but for others it can be hard to get into the habit of sitting down and writing day after day. The important thing is forward motion.

If your friend hobbled back from a marathon and said "I only \*gasp\* managed \*wheeze\* last place..." would you sneer in disgust and call them a failure? Not a chance. You'd pat them on the back, wait for them to finish throwing up, and congratulate them on their success. They may not have been amongst the front runners, but they still managed a considerable distance. And if they want to do better next year, they're going to train, and train, and train, and when their battered soles and their beaten souls can't take any more... they'll train even harder.

The same applies to NaNoWriMo; you may not end up with a Pulitzer-worthy piece of prose, but you will

have something worthy of your time – a large portion of a novel ready to be revised, rewritten, and redrafted. Whatever your end goal, NaNoWriMo is not the end. It is simply a means to an end.

## Freedom to just write

By beating your inner editor into submission you'll soon realise how good a writer you actually are. It sounds contradictory, but without that nagging voice berating your every move, you'll focus on plot and character development rather than fussing over the finer details. Instead of stopping to research exactly how a specific door would open, keep your character running down that hallway. Damn the details. A simple note in the margin to fix it later will suffice. Until then, continue writing. You'll find it's a lot easier to edit when you have something to edit.

Of course, NaNoWriMo isn't all beer and skittles. The constant pressure of trying to keep up with



**CHARLOTTE MIDDLETON – Seven-time Nanoer**

### What made you want to take part?

I already loved writing, and I liked that it seemed like a really intensive event – a chance to eat, sleep and breathe writing, as it were, for a short time. It's actually nice to have an excuse to be obsessed with something you love, to make the conscious decision to prioritise it for a while.

### Would you recommend NaNoWriMo to others?

Yes, wholeheartedly! It offers so much. It's fun, it's liberating, and you come out the other end with a massive sense of achievement. All kinds of people do it, from people who have never written a thing before in their lives to published authors,

and in that sense, I think it reminds you that we are actually all in the same boat. It takes away some of the sense of elitism in writing, you know, the idea of 'real writers' as opposed to just people who write, and reminds you that we all love and do the same thing.

### What do you enjoy most about NaNoWriMo?

The sense of freedom. Because the goal is quantity, not quality, you have a free pass, you can allow yourself to just write. You have the perfect excuse not to criticise yourself or worry about how terrible your writing might be, because that's not the point, at least for that one month.

the daily word count can take its toll. If you miss a day, tomorrow's target is all the harder to meet, and each day you miss makes it seem all the more impossible to catch up. You might suffer from NaNoWriMo withdrawal symptoms once December arrives, and even if you are on top of the world for conquering such an ambitious target, that sensation will soon be replaced with the dread of having to edit such a feral pile of words. This is where the write-ins and other Nanoers come in to play.

### A shared goal

Write-ins are regular gatherings where Nanoers write, discuss, and dissect their novels. Whether you come to chat, or sit in the corner in silence, there is something about creating in the company of other writers that can't fail to inspire. You'll feel able to talk about your favourite books without people's eyes glazing over; you can sit hunched over for hours on end scribbling away and tapping at keyboards without anyone suggesting you stop for some food or a pee break; you can get emotional at the death of beloved characters with people who will hug you rather than berate you for being so connected with mere words on the page. You can be a writer.

The meetings are also a safe haven for anxiety-ridden writers. There's no judgement – you write what you want to write how you want to write it. If you don't want to jump into the conversation, that's fine. We've all been the nervous first-timer finding our footing in a group of strangers. You'll be accepted regardless and maybe you'll even make a few new friends along the way. Possibly some contacts in the literary world.

Each region has at least one municipal liaison (ML) – a kind of group coordinator in charge of local factions of writers. 'In charge' is a term used loosely, as MLs are not strictly bosses. They are not there to enforce word counts or slap people on the wrist when they stray from a topic of conversation. An ML has multiple roles – friend, confidant, moderator, cheerleader, teammate, and fundraiser.

'Many of our participant writers aren't content with creating worlds

on the page,' says Sarah Mackey, NaNoWriMo director of community engagement. 'They graduate to building amazing, creative, local communities, who are actively engaged with their neighbourhood organisations and businesses.'

MLs will organise the main events: a Kick Off party so participants can mingle before their frantic task begins and a Thank God It's Over party after the event, for Nanoers to celebrate or commiserate their efforts. Nestled in between these events are write-ins, special donation days for the charity work NaNoWriMo undertakes, one-off events such as the Night of Writing Dangerously – six hours of writing, accompanied by dinner and drinks in a ballroom overlooking the twinkling lights of downtown San Francisco – and local activities for each district, worldwide. MLs are also there to deal with any problems that may arise during the month, and any queries or quandaries participants may have – all of this as well as actually attempting the challenge themselves!

You'll always find motivation on offer, whether it's from real life chats and light-hearted debates at the write-ins, communicating with an overseas Nanoer on the forums, or delving into the regular pep talks on offer from well-known writers – some of whose novels were born out of NaNoWriMo (*The Night Circus*, by Erin Morgenstern, *The Beautiful Land*, by Alan Averill, *Wool*, by Hugh Howey). While it's nice to know the challenge can lead to great success, try to remember your end product will be nowhere near publication level. Editors and publishers around the world will groan in unison as half-finished NaNoWriMo novels hit their desks on 1 December. Give the poor souls a break and concentrate on fine tuning your novel. (See next month's WM for advice on editing your draft into submission.)

In the end the most important thing to remember is that the challenge isn't over when November is... the spirit of NaNoWriMo endures. Write-ins will go on, charity work persists all year round, friendships will continue to blossom, and above all – you will finish that novel. **WM**



**CLAIRE SIMPSON**  
– Ten-time Nanoer  
(Nine as ML)

### Are the write-ins useful?

There's something particularly motivating about writing in the company of others, since they can all hear if you stop typing for any length of time. We aim for a fairly even split between writing and socialising, which gives people the opportunity to add to their word count while also keeping a relaxed atmosphere. Aside from the soft caress of peer pressure, having other people around is great when you need a name for a minor character or a way for your hero to escape certain death.

### What's the best part of NaNoWriMo?

The community, hands down. It's such a warm, supportive environment to write in. We've had last day write-ins where people have been cheered for reaching their goal, regardless of whether that goal was 50,000 or 5,000 words. We have people who seem to pour out the words without effort and people who sweat over every single sentence, and we celebrate all of them. There's advice, there's encouragement and there's always the motivation to write just a little bit more.

### What tips would you give a first-timer?

There are two things I say to anyone who's giving NaNoWriMo a go: the first is to take full advantage of the community, through the internet forums and the local write-ins. There's endless reams of advice, there's encouragement and there's always someone who's been through exactly what you are, regardless of what that is. The second is to relax and have fun. Find the story that you want to be writing, rather than the one you think you ought to be writing, find the way that feels best to write it, and always remember that every word you write is another word you wouldn't have written if you hadn't started on this journey.



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# FATTEN

## your first draft

*and complete cheats*

101 tips and tricks  to increase your word count

Sometimes – like, say, when you’re trying to write a novel in a month – getting through your first draft is all that matters. **Patsy Collins** offers suggestions, some less serious than others, to get you to the finish line

**W**hether or not you’re desperately trying to complete a daily requirement of 1,667 words for NaNoWriMo, getting lots of words onto page or screen is a good thing. It’s encouraging to see progress and it provides plenty of material to shape into the finished piece. These tips and tricks aren’t designed to make you a brilliant writer – just to get your first draft done and ready for editing.

**1** Switch off your inner editor (that part of you which isn’t satisfied with a sentence until it’s as good as you can possibly make it). They’ll be working hard later so give them a nice long rest now.

**2** If you’re not sure you’ll need a scene, write it anyway. You can always delete it if it’s not required.

**3** If you get stuck on a scene make a note about what needs to be done and go on. Do it in the document so it’s included in the word count.

**4** Same thing if you need to research a minor point.

**5** And if you realise you’ve made a mistake somewhere.

**6** Worried you’re repeating yourself? Write anyway and only keep the best version.

**7** Never, in a million years, pass up the chance to include clichés.

**8** Give your characters titles. ‘The Lord of Anytown’ is four times the wordcount of ‘Tim’.

**9** Give your characters multiple names. Tim Harold Cuthbert Smith, Lord of Anytown.

**10** If the genre suits then their lineage and attributes can go in too. Try replacing your MC’s name with Tim Harold Cuthbert Smith the third, son of Hippobreath, Lord of Anytown and halitosis-ridden defender of the biscuit barrel, and watch the word count rise.

**11** Never cut and paste. Instead copy and paste.



**12** Describe everything. It’s not a mug of coffee. It’s a white china mug decorated with a shiny red glaze on the outside, full to the brim with decaf instant, a splash of milk and three sugars.

**13** Give details. Don’t just have characters read a book but inform your readers that it’s a hardback, though not a first edition, of *The 100 Year Old Man Who Climbed Out The Window And Disappeared*.

**14** Mention the author.

**15** And the cover design.

**16** And where it was purchased.

**17** If you can do it without breaching copyright, get your character to read sections aloud.

**18** Be precise in your locations. Why write ‘they met in the street’ when you could put ‘they met in the High Street of Lee-on-the-Solent, right outside the butchers, which is opposite the opticians’?

**19** Don’t use hyphens. Make all compounds into separate words.

**20** Dialogue is your friend.

**21** As are almost deaf characters who need everything repeated.

**22** And characters who tell long boring stories, starting again at the beginning if they get interrupted.

**23** Write as people really speak with all the *umms*, *likes* and *you knows*.

**24** Don’t forget plenty of the, ‘It was Wednesday I think, or maybe Tuesday. No tell a lie it was Wednesday, but that’s not important,’ stuff.

**25** If characters remember poetry from school have them recite the entire thing.

**26** Have them do it in an echoey place.

- 21** Try to include at least one character who speaks in a different language via an interpreter and include both versions in full.
- 28** If there's no one else there, characters can always talk to themselves.
- 29** Don't stop to read back what you wrote yesterday.
- 30** Do not use contractions.
- 31** Overemphasise. For example, 'Definitely do not ever use contractions under any circumstances whatsoever'.
- 32** Be vague. 'At some point in time shortly after lunch' is better than '2pm'.
- 33** Be precise. 'He made his way there on foot, as no bus was scheduled, in as direct a route as was humanly possible and at times reaching a speed of seven point zero three miles per hour,' is clearly preferable to, 'He ran straight there'.
- 34** Show all the thoughts of all your characters all the time.
- 35** Tell everything from everyone's point of view even if each version is pretty much identical. (Copy and paste speeds this up.)
- 36** Use long titles, lyrics or quotes as headers for every chapter
- 37** Have characters write up everything you've shown into their diary.
- 38** Countdowns are good in dramatic scenes. Have them start at 100 though, not three.
- 39** Don't be afraid to digress.
- 40** Have characters who are taught things and required to repeat back word for word the complicated instructions. Ideally make them partially deaf, with a stutter and have the instructor speak via an interpreter, show the scene from each point of view and be sure the characters then mention it all in their diaries.
- 41** When a character orders food, let us 'see' the entire menu.
- 42** Not sure of the best word? Get out the thesaurus and utilise, deploy and put to use every available alternative.
- 43** Include a lot of minor characters.
- 44** Give characters a pet.
- 45** Make sure they talk to the pet.
- 46** Give your characters complicated dreams and describe these vividly.
- 47** Have your character visit a museum and read every signboard.
- 48** Use lots of really short words – you can type more of them in a limited amount of time.
- 49** Don't omit any of the back story.
- 50** Use every scrap of research material.
- 51** Clarify everything.
- 52** Always show, never tell. For example don't just mention 'she'd never liked heights' but flash back to several scary childhood events, recall her many sessions with a counsellor, her disastrous relationship with a mountaineer and her obsession with flat shoes.
- 53** Compare everything with something else. It's not just sunny, it's as sunny as it was the day before yesterday.
- 54** No more coffee until you've done 1,000 words.
- 55** No bathroom breaks until you've done another 1,000.
- 56** Words such as 'that' and 'some' can be slipped in almost anywhere.
- 57** Use 'and' rather than commas in lists. Punctuation marks don't up the word count.
- 58** Don't fret over punctuation. You'll probably change it later anyway and deciding between a comma and a semi colon takes as long as writing the words which will complete the sentence.
- 59** Attribute all dialogue and be sure to explain exactly how it was said, eg 'Shh, they'll hear you,' whispered Pete quietly.
- 60** Have lots of wonderful, descriptive words and large quantities of lovely adjectives. (See what I did there?)
- 61** Include authorial intrusion and asides.
- 62** Use as many examples as possible. For example, if she loves flowers, list fifty of her favourites.
- 63** Adverbs are underused. Quickly and gleefully put that right.
- 64** Never mind the quality – feel the word count.
- 65** Unplug the phone (and never mind that such a phrase will reveal your age).
- 66** Disconnect wifi.



**67** Don't assume you can catch up at the weekend, or tomorrow after a better night's sleep. Do today's word count today.

**68** And try to do some of tomorrow's. Think how smug you'll feel if you finish ahead of schedule.

**69** If for some reason you do fall behind don't use that as an excuse to stop or fall further behind.

**70** Race a writing buddy.

**71** You don't need to wait for NaNo to start. You can get your planning and research done in advance, or set up your own personal challenge, or do one with a group.

**72** Don't think about the story – just write it.

**73** Don't talk about the story – just write it.

**74** If you know that 1667 words a day simply isn't possible for you, work out a realistic yet challenging target and work towards that. If it's a good result for you then it's a good result. Or if 50,000 in a month isn't much of a challenge for you, write 100k.

**75** Never abbreviate anything. It's not the Beeb. It's the British Broadcasting Company.

**76** Don't delete anything however rubbish it might be. (You're not a good judge of quality whilst in the middle of a first draft.)

**77** Write in a genre you love. It'll be far easier to keep going.

**78** If you get stuck or frustrated write about it and how you'd like the story to be going. Call it 'planning notes' and include it in the word count.

**79** If you seem to be near the story's end without enough words done, just throw more obstacles in the character's way or start on the sequel.

**80** Keep your notebook or laptop with you to write in any free moments. Even a couple of extra sentences each day will add up.

**81** Decide how to track your word count. Will seeing what you've done, or what's left to

do, be the most motivating for you?

**82** If you have a chance to write then write – don't wait until you're in the mood or have a great idea.

**83** Don't give yourself an excuse. Have paper and pens ready, make sure your tablet is charged.

**84** Don't waste time justifying your writing to anyone else. You're as entitled to spend your time doing it as they are to watch TV or go shopping.

**85** It's just words. Write them.

**86** Don't text people or post Facebook updates. If you've got time for that you've got time to add words to your story.

**87** The next thing that happens to you in life, put it in the story.

**88** Don't worry about spelling. Sausage ups your word count just as effectively as sausage.

**89** Use metaphors.

**90** Use similes.

**91** Don't stop to think about what might happen to your story after you've finished. Worries of rejection are demoralising, hopes of success are distracting.

**92** Get your characters to tell each other stories.

**93** Give the details even when your character is doing everyday stuff and add depth and meaning. Show their joy as they brush their teeth. Reveal their anger as they scramble eggs.

**94** Find and replace is good. Replace 'then' with 'and the very next thing which happened was that'.

**95** Introduce a child who has the irritating habit of repeating everything anyone says.

**96** Show exactly how much this irritates each character.

**97** Have plenty of detailed flashbacks.



**98** Have your character read all their birthday cards – including printed verses.

**99** Foreshadow every major plot point.

**100** Spell out numbers and dates. Without hyphens.

**101** Remember it's just a first draft. They're not supposed to be perfect and no one but you will ever read it.



Getting your first draft done is an achievement. Afterwards you should take time to feel proud of yourself. Not too long though as you've now got an editing job on your hands. Come back next month for practical advice on editing your first draft into submission.

# Writing on the go

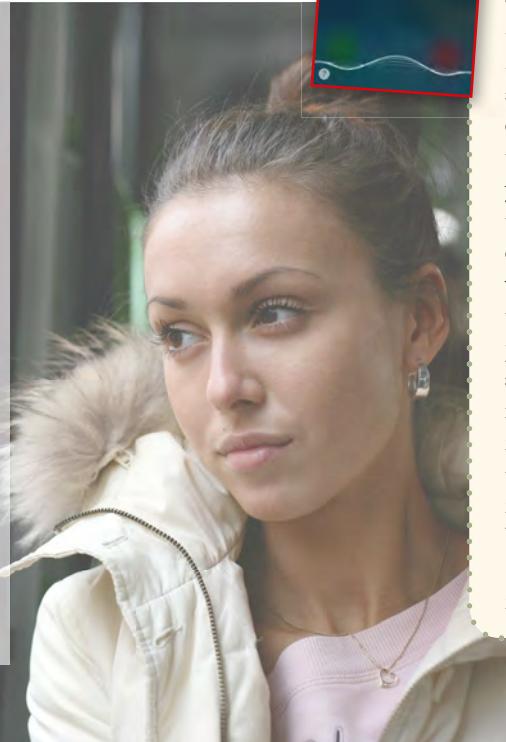


## Always carry a notebook

I'm certainly not offering this one as a piece of new advice, but it's so vital I couldn't think of starting this article with anything else! I have hundreds of small pads and frequently discover forgotten favourites whenever I use a bag I've not used for a while – mostly full of nonsense but that's beside the point. If you have your trusty notepad with you then you can jot down ideas, snatches of overheard dialogue, publications to target with submissions – nothing need ever be forgotten again. Plus, the person who always has a pen and paper on them is a very useful person to know.

## Write in the car or on the bus

We spend a huge amount of our time travelling from one place to another, and whilst I'm not advocating you knock up a chapter or two whilst driving on the motorway, there are plenty of ways of making use of this time. If you're travelling to somewhere new or interesting then you're probably better off looking out the window in search of inspiration rather than being completely insensible to your surroundings, but if you're on a bus or train journey that you do every day then you might as well whip out that notebook or tablet and get writing. Even if you drive, there are probably plenty of occasions when you end up waiting around – picking up the kids from school, for example – and could use this dead time for something more useful.



**Out and about? You can still get on with your writing. Ten top tips from writing tutor **Liz Gregory****

**W**hen we think of an author working away at their latest masterpiece, we tend to imagine them at home, perhaps sitting at their desk or perched at the dining room table with their laptop. Whilst it's true that one of the joys of writing is that it can be done entirely at home, it's a more portable hobby than you might think. Here are a few suggestions for capturing your creativity wherever you may be.

### Make the most of your work lunch break.

Very few of us make a full-time living from writing, and require a day job as well that actually pays the mortgage and puts food on the table. This can actually work to your advantage though, by providing a structure to your day and forcing you to timetable your writing activities where you can fit them in – during your lunch break is an ideal time to get some writing done, or perhaps you get to your desk early every day and can spend twenty minutes or so then over your first coffee of the day. The very fact that you only have limited time may well encourage that pen to get moving a little quicker than if you had the full day at your disposal!

### Use technology

Much as I love a notebook, it's hard to deny that modern technology has made it much easier for us to write whilst out and about. Some of these are self-evident – laptops are now pretty ubiquitous, and seem to get smaller and lighter almost by the week – but there are other ways of making technology work for you that you may not yet use on a regular basis. If you have a tablet or smartphone, for example, there are plenty of writing apps that you can download to help you record and store your work whilst you're away from home – some of these essentially do the same job as the word processing package on your laptop, and most are free or quite inexpensive to download. I frequently use the voice recording function on my phone, either for recording interviews or just to make a quick note of something that pops into my head and which I don't want to forget before I get home.

See p78 for more ideas to use technology to improve your workflow.

## Write on holiday

Not all of us can stretch to long, luxurious holidays throughout the year, but most of us are able to afford a few days away every so often where we can escape the routines and pressures of daily life. No matter where you are, a holiday provides an excellent opportunity to spend a little more time on your writing – perhaps on the beach or by the pool, or on your balcony over breakfast, or (all too likely if you're staying in this country) on a wet day when you are confined indoors.

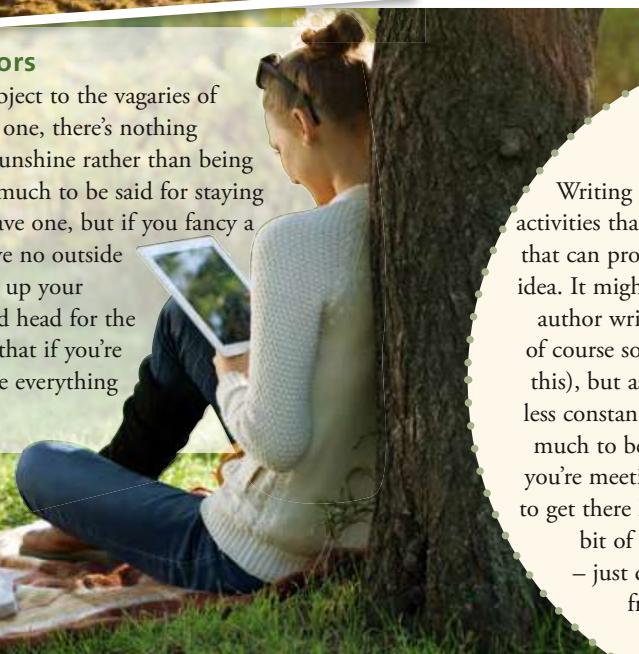
The combination of a relaxed

atmosphere and a change of location may well prompt a flurry of new ideas – and if not, at least you can go and get an ice cream and pretend you're doing some deep thinking.



## Visit the great outdoors

Whilst we are undeniably subject to the vagaries of the British weather with this one, there's nothing nicer than catching a bit of sunshine rather than being cooped up at home. There's much to be said for staying in your own garden if you have one, but if you fancy a change of scene or if you have no outside space of your own then pack up your notebook and your tablet and head for the nearest park. Just remember that if you're relying on technology to have everything fully charged before you go.



## Get reading

Being a writer also involves being a reader – it's impossible to perfect your own craft without an appreciation of the work of others. If you feel too self-conscious to actually write while you're out and about, or find that you need to be at home to concentrate properly, then use your time on the move to soak up some inspiration from other writers you enjoy and admire. Pop a paperback into your bag, or download an audio book or podcast onto your phone, or a newspaper onto your tablet – very useful for making long and boring journeys go quickly!



## Go to the library

Where better to write than a building full of existing words and knowledge? Libraries come in all shapes and sizes these days but they are all public spaces that we have every right to make use of – whether this is by borrowing books, using the computers to go online, attending talks or by finding a quiet space to sit and write.

Some libraries are beautiful and inspiring locations in their own right – I live in Manchester where we are lucky enough to have both The John Rylands and Central Library, two astonishing examples, right in the city centre. Funding for libraries is on a downward spiral and many are closing or facing reduced hours, so do use them if you can.



## Find yourself some refreshments.

Writing is thirsty work, and as there are very few activities that don't make me hungry, working in a venue that can provide you with sustenance seems an excellent idea. It might be a bit of a cliché to think of the aspiring author writing away in their local café (and there are of course some very famously documented examples of this), but as most places provide free wifi and more or less constant access to good coffee and cake then there's much to be said for this particular cliché. Similarly, if you're meeting a friend at the pub then it's no hardship to get there half an hour early and enjoy a pint and do a bit of writing whilst you're waiting for them – just don't imbibe too enthusiastically or the fruits of your labour might leave a little something to be desired.



## Visit a friend

Now, it obviously wouldn't be quite the done thing to pop round to see a non-writing friend and whip your laptop out and start typing away, pausing only to request wine from time to time. But if you have a friend (or group of friends) who also enjoys writing then an evening round at theirs could be the perfect opportunity to get some writing done. Writing can be quite a solitary activity, and teaming up with a friend can be an excellent way of being sociable whilst also hitting some writing goals – just take along whatever you're working on and either collaborate or write in companionable silence. Then you get the glass of wine.

Remember, what all successful writers have in common is their ability to get the job done, and sometimes that means getting to work no matter where you happen to be. If you ever find yourself complaining that you're stuck in a rut or can't make time to write, ditch the excuses and get yourself on the move instead.



# PEN PUSHERS

## In a FLASH!

Cut your fiction into lean shape with exercises from **Lizzie Enfield**

**S**six-word short stories are the ultimate pieces of flash fiction and there was a particular six-word sentence that captured all of our attention last year: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'

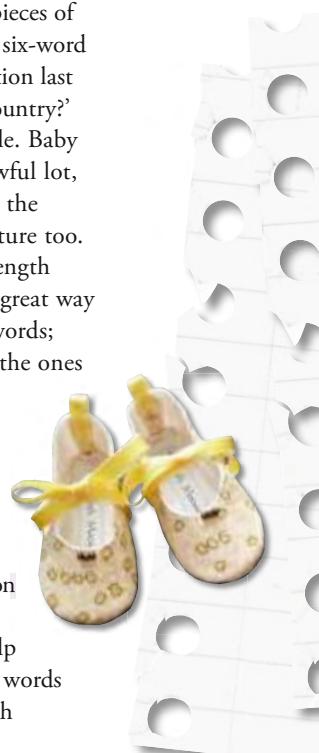
As with Hemingway's apocryphal 'For Sale. Baby Shoes. Never worn.' six words can say an awful lot, tell you a great deal of back story, touch on the present and make you wonder about the future too.

Even if your writing goal is a *Goldfinch*-length novel, trying your hand at flash fiction is a great way of practising getting the most out of your words; making each one you use count and losing the ones that don't.

Many writers, and I hold my hands up to this, have a habit of using words to try to meet a word count or simply because the words are flowing.

Sometimes those words get in the way of a story because they hinder the reader's imagination or get in the way of plot and characters.

The following exercises are designed to help you both discover how to pinpoint excessive words and demonstrate how to build a piece of flash fiction from scratch.

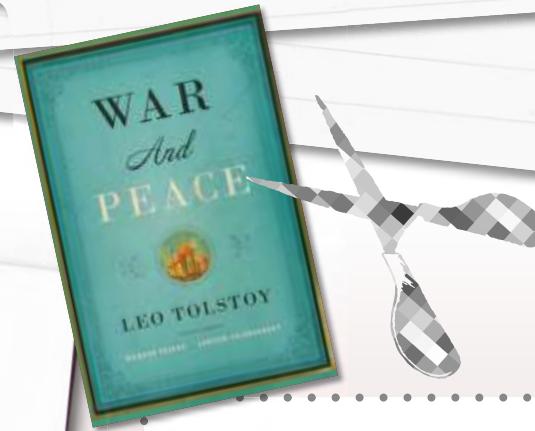


### EXERCISE ONE

#### Cutting Down

- Select a short story you've written that is either completed or near completion. Save the file with a new name so you don't lose your original work.
- Go through the piece and remove every single adjective and adverb.
- Next, remove words, phrases, and sentences that do not move the action of the story forward, especially if they are solely there for description.
- Finally, go through the story one last time removing as much as you can without making the piece unintelligible.

How much leaner is your story? Ask yourself, does it really lack anything? This should give you an idea of just how much a story can be stripped away to reveal its core elements.



### EXERCISE TWO

#### Writing flash fiction from scratch.

- Try to think of a story with a beginning, middle and end and with a central conflict. Write it in less than 500 words.
- If you can't think of a new story, try taking a scene from a film or chapter of a novel and write it in around 500 words.
- Try taking the plot of a well-known book or movie – *War and Peace* for example – and writing it as a piece of flash fiction.
- Or try using a very short piece of writing – a six-word story or an interesting sentence that springs out from a newspaper or magazine – and turn it into a longer short story.

Both the above exercises should make you realise how many unnecessary words we pack into our writing. It's interesting to see how the skeleton of a story can emerge once you start to strip them away but also how a pared-down sentence can trigger various responses, lead you to think and want to write more about it. In many ways that is what a reader does when you give them a few words to consider. **Wm**

# Red Editing Pen

Each month, we give you three sentences which would all benefit from some careful use of your red editing pen. As writers, and regular readers of *Writing Magazine*, you should not find any of these too difficult. But if you need some help, check out the suggested solutions below.

Here are this month's three:

- 1** Celia had an old tea box which she used as an alternate filing system rather than relying on computer records, also she still used a typewriter to address envelopes but she defended her old fashioned approach with great ferociousness.
- 2** Stephen preferred to make payment up front rather than wait till he received an invoice but had no sooner settled his account when a final demand arrived.
- 3** Ralph was annoyed to find that the price of his morning newspaper had increased by yet another one pence, then even more annoyed to realise that he was late for an appointment with his Bank Manager.



## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

**1** There is increasing confusion about the difference between *alternate* and *alternative*, particularly influenced by our US cousins – and in our first sentence we have got it wrong. The word *alternate* should be used to indicate that things occur in turns continuously. So your football club could play in alternate stripes of blue and whites. What they would not do is play in alternative stripes or on alternative Saturday afternoons.

It therefore follows that Celia's splendid old tea box provided an alternative filing system, not an alternate one.

Moving on, look at the phrase *old fashioned ways*. If we were applying two separate adjectives to *ways*, *old* and *fashioned*, they should appear as they have here, although many would also argue for the inclusion of a comma between them. But in this case, the *old* is a modifier of *fashioned*, making a single compound adjective, which should be linked by a hyphen.

Many people who have a liking for old-fashioned ways also tend to be careful about their grammar: so Celia would not have used *also* in the way it is used in our first sentence, as a conjunction joining two parts of the sentence together. In fact *also* is an adverb (as in *also tend* in the sentence immediately above). And not using it as a conjunction usually means that we should avoid having *also* straight after a comma. The best thing to do in this sentence would simply be to replace *also* with the conjunction *and*, or to split it in two with a full stop after *records*.

Let us move on to the end of our sentence one and look for a moment at the final word *ferociousness*. Nothing wrong with *ferociousness* (the dictionary allows it) except that it is a bit long. The dictionary also allows *ferocity* which means precisely the same thing, and it is always best to opt for the shorter word if you can. So here, there is a case for *ferocity* rather than *ferociousness*.

**2** Two words or one? *Up front* or *upfront*? The single word version is certainly infiltrating the language, and already it is normal usage when referring to making a payment in advance. Which means that we would be better, in our sentence two, to

refer to Stephen making his payment *upfront* rather than *up front*.

The single word version has long been used as an adjective to mean frank and open (as in: *she was upfront about her opinions*), whilst we generally use the two word version as an adjective (*he played up front with the forward line*). But the single word *upfront* is increasingly being used as an adverb as Americanisations creep into the language.

Let us stay with Stephen and his payments for a moment: should he wait *till* he receives an invoice or *until* he receives it? The two words are synonymous, and the choice really depends on the degree of formality you wish to achieve – *until* being the more formal choice, so either version would be acceptable in the context of our sentence two. However, as the opening word in any sentence you should always go for *until* rather than *till*.

At the close of sentence two, note that *sooner* should be followed by *than*, not by *when*. We should be saying: *Stephen had no sooner settled his account than a final demand arrived*.

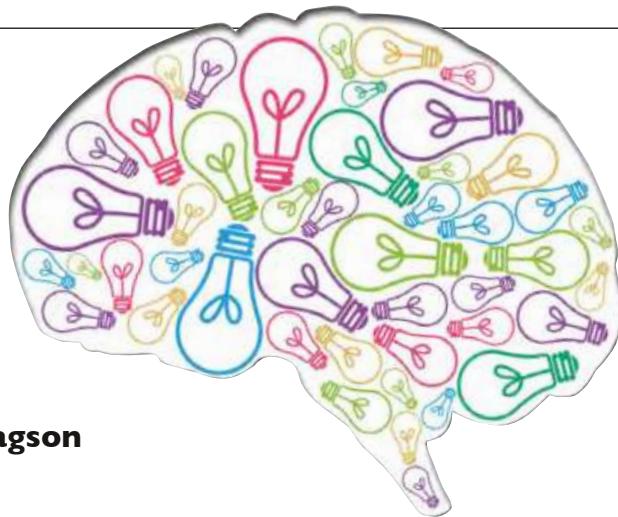
**3** Ralph was clearly having a bad day, but there are a couple of things we should note. First, he found that the price of his paper had increased by one pence. The trouble is that *pence* is the plural version of *penny*. We should be using the single version and say that the price had increased by *one penny*, not *one pence*.

What about the capitalisation of *Bank Manager*? There is a tendency to use unnecessary capitalisation with increasing frequency. We are often invited, for example, to contact one of our Customer Advisers or even to write to the Manager. Do either of these examples justify capitals? In the *W/M* office, we always ask whether you would do the same for *Toilet Cleaner*.

It is optional and you can opt for your own preference, but there does seem to be an increasing overuse of capitals. Capitalisation of seasons (Spring, Summer etc), of regions (Western Europe, Southern Hemisphere, and so forth). There is a strong case for avoiding this kind of usage and clearing up the growing frequency of capital letters. 

# POINT in view

A clear mind makes for easier writing, says **Adrian Magson**



**O**ne of the biggest obstacles to writing is having too many ideas and thoughts rushing through your mind at any one time. This is never more so than when hoping to get a good night's sleep ready for writing the next day.

It's as much of a problem for full-time writers as it is for beginners, because unlike many things in life, writing – at least the part which demands putting down new ideas or scenes – is not something that gets easier the more you do it. Consequently, instead of focusing on the conflict in the story, we find ourselves confounded by the conflict of ideas, and wading through them to the good stuff can be a real headache.

From long experience, I find the best solution to this, instead of going for long walks or banging my head repeatedly on my desk, lies in bed at night just before going to sleep.

What you have to do is clear the brain of conflicting plot thoughts by writing down a rough outline of the idea which most appeals to be worked on next (and by next I mean the next day or the earliest next writing session). This will help in two important ways.

## Focus

Having something specific to focus on when you next sit down to write, rather than a blank page and the internal question of 'now, what do I do next?' will save time, angst and creative effort. Having a definite goal will also avoid the usual procrastinatory activities like drinking coffee, cleaning the keyboard, checking email and all the other drudgy tasks that we use simply to put off the inevitable.

## Narrow your options

This isn't always easy to do, but it's the best way to approach any problem. Having too much choice is like wandering into your favourite bakers and trying to decide which mouth-watering pastry would go best with your morning cuppa. (I know – I've been there and got the cream on my T-shirt to prove it). You'll start off working on one idea, all the time with a part of your brain wondering if maybe that other one...

And that's no way to be productive. You're simply watering down your creative output and not giving your best idea the attention it deserves.

Ah, I hear you say. But how do I know that this is my best idea? What about that one with the singing octopus, or the one with the troupe of flying fish in tutus and top hats? I mean, they're both belters, aren't they?

You don't know. None of us do. But if there's one that's been bugging you no end, constantly sticking its head above the parapet of potentially brilliant thoughts, it must mean something, even if it does involve flying fish or an octopus. Otherwise you'd have forgotten about it months ago and gone onto something else, or taken up knitting barbed wire underpants. The only way to exorcise this kind of bug is to write it, get it out of the bone and on to the page, work it, thrash it to pieces until you know whether it has legs or not.

## Don't read – write

Having decided on the one – and this could be a chapter in your book or an idea that you've been churning over a few days or even a random scene you think would work later on in the story – it doesn't matter; get to bed, banish



all thoughts of non-writerly jobs or reading the next chapter of your current book, open your notebook and start writing.

Splurge. Let it all out. This is creative writing at its best, because you're not thinking about editing, punctuation or grammar, or any of those other annoyingly correct things you have to deal with in the morning; you're outlining a scene, a chapter, maybe even a conversation between characters. All you have to do is get the bones of it down on paper.

This is when I find I can't write fast enough; where thoughts begin to pile out of my brain like prisoners in a jailbreak. But that's good, because without thinking of anything else (such as all the other intrusive ideas that hit me during daylight), I can let my mind work on this one piece and pin it down, even if in a scribbled outline format.

Best of all, I know that come morning, instead of trying to wrestle with all the different ideas I might have been toying with – and losing sleep in the process – I'll have a specific task I can look forward to rather than a blank nothing.

But. (Of course there's a but; what do you think this is – the ABC to an easy life?) Don't try more than one idea or scene. Otherwise you'll end up mentally thrashing about and no better off than if you'd just gone to bed normally.

Instead, you should be able to close the notebook, satisfied that you have the grains – maybe more than that – of something you can flesh out and finish next time you sit down.

Most importantly, you'll have your notes to work from so you don't have to try remembering it all.

Try it – you might be surprised by what you can achieve. **W**

## TOP TIPS

- Reduce your options. Focus on one scene or chapter at a time.
- Don't edit – simply throw your thoughts down on the page.
- Go to sleep knowing you've got something positive to work on at the next session.
- Repeat nightly as required.

# WIN! £500 *IN CASH PRIZES & PUBLICATION*



## Flash Fiction competition

Flash fiction does what it says on the can – it tells a story in a flash. In this competition the flash lasts just 500 words, because that is the maximum word count you have. You do have an open brief in terms of subject matter and theme, so the only restriction is that 500-word limit.

The closing date is **11 December**.

**There are three prizes on offer, £150 for first, and £50 for second and third, with each of the winners being published in *Writing Magazine*.**

The entry fee is £5, or £3 for WM subscribers.

**CLICK  
HERE TO  
ENTER!**

**STILL TIME  
TO ENTER**

With their closing dates of 12 November, there is still time to enter the short story and poetry competitions announced in last month's *Writing Magazine*.

The short story competition is for an adult fairy story of 1,500-1,700 words. Our annual open rhymed poetry competition has an open brief and a 40-line limit.

# A CALCULATED RISK

*By LOUISE JACOBSSON*

**S**ally Miller are you crazy? I knew that would be the first words out of Jessie's mouth when I got home and she found out I had walked alone through the campus park at night. My flatmate was such an infuriating mother hen, but I adored her. No one had a more genuine heart. Jessie knew I never took unnecessary risks though; my obsessions in life being statistics and probability. Still she would have a valid point as local media, and some national ones too now, were ablaze with details of the three horrific murders that had occurred here over the past two months.

The victims had all been fellow students; my age, build and colouring. Well I suppose not entirely, since Alison, who had been in my statistics class, had not actually been a natural blond. On that note I tucked a stubborn stray curl back in under my woolly hat before pausing in the pale glow of the next lamppost's light.

Warily I looked around before crouching down and clumsily retying my shoelace. Wearing gloves made the task take longer than necessary, but I wasn't in any hurry.

In fact the complete opposite was true.

I loved this park; it had such a peaceful feel with the twisting and turning paths and the abundance of segregating shrubbery creating a sense of seclusion, especially so at night. The sound of gushing and gurgling water combined with the acrid scent of damp moss gave away that the small central lake with its quaint waterfall feature was just round the bend. In a month the telltale signs would be absent though as early winter frost would make them shut off the pumps and the moss would simply dry out and die. I shoved my hands safely back in the pockets of my jacket. Jessie didn't understand why I favoured the campus brand canvas jacket.

Sure it wasn't necessarily stylish, but it was warm, it was practical and it allowed me to blend in, something I sometimes struggled with.

Listening to the sounds of the night, isolating away the soft gushing water and the dry rustling of the leaves still desperately clinging to the branches, I could now make out the sound of crunching gravel.

Someone was approaching.

A shape stepped out of the darkness. I straightened and stiffened trying to make out who it was. The other person had equally stiffened and halted upon spotting me. The light above revealed my innocuous exterior and almost instantly the dark shape visibly relaxed, beginning to move again, themselves then entering the dim circle of glow.

It was Marjory; I knew she always used this shortcut through the park to get home from the gallery after locking up. Vain, selfish, and spoiled Marjory Claxton, who thought her entitled existence allowed her to get away with murder. My feet began moving again and as we got closer there was a faint smile of vague recognition playing on her lips. I smiled back while my left hand surreptitiously found its way out of the pocket clenching the piano wire tight, passing one plastic handle covered end to the right as it had also exited the dark confines of the canvas.

With a swift pirouette I turned as we passed. My hands shot out and wrapped the wire round her neck. I could feel the wire sink into her flesh as I pulled it tight, a slender neck no competition for its harsh brutal edge.

There was not much chance for Marjory to fight back. Her hands clawed aimlessly at her own neck desperately trying to get at the wire while it sank deeper and deeper into the tissue. Her raspy gurgling gasps effectively covered by the waterfall whispers.

Everyone just assumed that the killer plaguing campus was a man, something I found an advantage really. Marjory's reaction had been the same as that of Madison, Ally and Rebecca. A lone woman always relaxed once she saw that the other person was also female; it was a given. I also did not look in any way dangerous or intimidating, being of a modest slender build. Being an avid rock climber I was much stronger than most my size though.

My carefully chosen victims never saw it coming and therefore didn't stand a chance. To prove my point Marjory began to slump and go limp, life gradually leaving her. This was the moment all my hard work and planning for the past eighteen months had been in preparation for. Marjory had been my main aim all along. I was sorry that Madison, Ally, Rebecca, and Janet had to pay such a steep price for smaller



**Louise Jacobsson** lives in Golborne near Warrington and is originally from Sweden. Since childhood she has always enjoyed writing and creating characters. Working as a museum manager, with a background in history, archaeology and art, over the past twenty years she has mainly written research pieces and factual text for visitors to the museum. However, this has not stopped her from rekindling her interest in writing fiction in recent years, focusing on dark drama and crime. She has created three amateur murder mysteries for performance, a novel which she is now looking to get published, and is mum to fourteen-month-old Freja.

offences purely to hide my true target. But it was all part of my carefully calculated plan.

No one looked at individual motive where a serial killer was concerned. Not as long as the victims all fitted the same profile. If any links were thought to exist with the killer it was usually with the first victim, not the fourth.

Of course I couldn't very well leave it with Marjory as that would raise suspicion, hence Janet being next in line to die in three weeks time. My regret about having to kill four extra people was not substantial enough to come into the equation.

Marjory ultimately had to pay for what she had done.

It might have been four years ago now, and she undoubtedly thought that there was no fallout from her actions. Her "daddy dearest" had paid all the right people to make it go away, and being a hotshot lawyer he also had all the necessary connections needed to keep his daughter from ever facing even one single night in holding.

We had been told that there wasn't enough evidence to proceed to prosecution.

Granted her car having been rapidly repaired and repainted first thing the following day could have been deemed mere coincidence, but I had been an eyewitness to events.

I saw her drinking copious amounts at the party earlier in the evening, never a moment where she didn't clutch a glass of her beloved chardonnay.

I saw her argue with Nick, my stepbrother, shoving him and yelling at him that he was such a killjoy, having a go at him for not letting her have a good enough time at her own party.

I saw her staggering all over the place as she struggled to maintain basic motor-skills following us out the door when we left; her shrill shrieked accusations of Nick not loving her... maybe even cheating on her as we got into our car.

Granted I didn't see her get into her Mercedes and set off at high speed following us down the road; however I heard Nick cursing under his breath as he spotted her car approaching fast in the rear-view mirror. Our eyes had met and I had recognized that he was upset. Nick had tried so hard to make things work, to see the good in Marjory if it was in there somewhere.

I turned to look back just as she slammed into us.

They had said my memory could not be relied on; I'd received a head injury in the accident. But I had seen Marjory's mascara streaked frenzied face as we collided, no one could ever convince me otherwise.

The next few seconds were a blur as our car careened off the road and rolled repeatedly until a sturdy tree stopped our movement dead.

In one fell swoop our whole world had literally been turned upside down. My seatbelt dug deep into my shoulder, stomach and hips as it was all that was stopping me from plummeting out of my seat. The pain in my battered broken body kept me from thinking straight, but one all consuming panic remained; was Nick okay? I tried to turn my head and look at him, but my body refused to comply.

'Sal... are you... there?'

Hearing his voice eased the sick knot in my stomach.

'Nick I'm here, I'm okay.'

'Sal... I'm... so... sorry. I... wish...'

I never did find out what he wished. Nick was gone. All that remained was deathly silence and the dark despair of loss. It was hours before someone passed and spotted the wreckage.

Marjory had rammed us off the road and then just left us there to die.

This was where my skill with numbers turned into an obsession.

Why did I survive and Nick die? The probability was near identical for the opposite outcome. Yet here I stood like a phoenix risen.

I glanced down on Marjory's now lifeless body at my feet and smiled. I knew why I had survived; it was for this very moment.

Pleased with myself I set off home; there the true reason why I couldn't afford to get caught waited patiently for me. As I exited the park I checked my phone. There was a message from Jessie with a picture of her and Josh pulling faces.

Josh shouldn't exist; the odds had been against it from the start. Nick and I were only together the once, we hadn't meant for it to happen and we had agreed that it could never and should never happen again. He'd been upset after yet another stupid row with Marjory; I'd tried to comfort him and then one thing lead to another. He'd even used protection.

When the crash happened I'd only been six weeks pregnant, I hadn't even known about it then. The doctors told me in the hospital afterwards, they said it was a miracle that the baby had survived.

Josh was my little miracle!

He was the one glorious exception to all the rules and laws of probability.

However Nick had never known he existed; never got to hold him in his arms nor see his sweet beaming smile. Marjory had not only killed Nick, robbed me of my best friend since I was ten, but she had also stolen a major part of Josh's life.

There was no way I could have let her get away with it.

Vengeance was mine!

Marjory ultimately hadn't gotten away with murder but I would... I never did anything without calculating the risks involved first.

## JUDGING COMMENTS

There is a truism that crime writers often apply to murder stories: find the motive, they say, and you find the killer. The point is that murder is seldom random. People who kill usually have very strong reasons.

Certainly our narrator character Sally Miller had plenty of motive for the killing of Marjory Claxton. It was Marjory who had killed Nick, Sally's stepbrother and the unknowing father of her child, in an intentional, if drunken, car smash. That Marjory had not known about the child, nor indeed had Nick, makes no difference to Sally's motivation – except that it makes the whole episode more chilling.

'More' chilling because the way that Sally plans the killing is chilling enough on its own – enough for the story to fit the psychological thriller genre.

At the root of Sally's plans is her passion for statistics, and statistics have no emotions, no feelings. She knows that if her revenge killing is part of a serial murder case, the police will focus on the wrong things. They will focus on the first in this series of murders, trying to find connections there with the killer.

But, of course, they will also direct their attentions to the latest, the final, murder – again probing for connections. Tucked away in this series of killings is number four, Marjory Claxton, and that is where police attention should be focused. Instead, understandably, they will have looked for connections, and the Marjory connection will be near impossible to find.

Number four in a killing series does not raise especial interest: she was not the first, nor the last. And she would need such intensive investigation to uncover her motive that, statistically, it would never emerge.

And if you don't find the motive, you don't find the killer.

## SHORTLISTED

Runner-up in the crime story competition, whose story is published on [www.writers-online.co.uk](http://www.writers-online.co.uk).

**Sheila Kondras** from South Knighton, Leicester. Entries shortlisted to final judging stage were from: **Geoffrey Boxall**, Gosport, Hampshire; **Gillian Brown**, Peyriac de Mer, France; **Michael Callaghan**, Clarkston, Glasgow; **Karen Coulter**, Hull; **Sarah Dawson**, Tunbridge Wells, Kent; **Mary Lally**, Kings Heath, Birmingham; **Fiona Lloyd**, Horsforth, Leeds; **Sally Trueman**, Keynsham, Bristol.



# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Finding the right name can be crucial to your character development, explains **Gary Dalkin**

**N**ames are important. We identify ourselves and others by them. Before we know anything else, a name tells us something about a person. It can even lead us to make assumptions about class, nationality or ethnicity, which may later turn out to be wrong. Names are a key part of fiction.

While there are many successful novels (and films and stories of all sorts) where the names of the characters don't stick in the memory, a well-named character is to be cherished. Names can be purely functional, a way of telling the characters apart, or they can be so much more. They can be symbolic, humorous, ironic, and at their best, the names of characters become emblematic of the stories those characters appear, perhaps even entering popular culture to such an extent as to ensure literary immortality.

'Bond, James Bond' – one of the most memorable lines in all cinema. Many things contributed to the success of Ian Fleming's superspy, but surely high among them was the name. Would the novels, and then the films, have been so successful if the character had been called something different? Perhaps – we can never know. But Tim Philpot probably wouldn't have worked.

Authors can spend a long time deliberating over what to call a character, and Fleming was a master of the art. So how did he chose the name for his hero? It came, after much deliberation, from the name of another writer. A keen bird watcher, Fleming owned a book on the *Birds of the West Indies*, by one James Bond. The name struck Fleming because he wanted something 'as ordinary as possible'. He did contact the real James

Bond to get permission, and later wrote to Bond's wife explaining: 'It struck me that this brief, unromantic, Anglo-Saxon and yet very masculine name was just what I needed, and so a second James Bond was born.' The rest is history.

## MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE

But how should you go about choosing your characters' names? If you are going, as Fleming did, to use the name of a real, living person, ask first. That said, there are seven billion people on planet earth, and lots of them have the same name. If you need an everyman/woman character and pick a very common name, then no one can claim that you have based your fictional character on them – unless details of your fiction happen to match their own biography. You should be fine calling a character Jane Brown.

Stephen King opted for this very approach when choosing the name for the protagonist of his novel *The Dead Zone*. He called his lead character John Smith, and King has said that the reason he did so was for the very reason few writers ever do chose such plain and utilitarian names, and that it was unrealistic not to have fictional characters with the simple names we find in real life. Smith is an ordinary man, a teacher in his twenties, engaged and engaging, a decent, unremarkable young all-American man – to whom something extraordinary happens. The underlying implication this choice of name is that what happens to John Smith could happen to any of us, any time, because John Smith is just as ordinary as you or I or any of the millions of people

who read King's books.

George Orwell gave us a different Smith for the everyman hero of his blackly satiric science fiction novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Writing in the late 1940s, Orwell chose to give his character the first name of Winston. There was at the time, and still even now, only one Winston his readers would have thought of, Britain's great wartime leader, Winston Churchill. Yet Smith can stand for anyone, and in the novel even the great Winston is brought low, and by implication, everything he and Britain stood and fought for is defeated. Names matter. It was, after all, the same novel which gave us Big Brother as the name for the impersonal leader of the all pervasive dictatorship. Orwell's irony lacerates; a big bother is supposed to protect, not dominate, stifle and ultimately destroy.

For his first novel King chose a different tack. His anti-heroine is called Carrietta White. It is a name given by her mentally unstable, religious fanatic mother. The White part of the name may be plain and simple, but it is also symbolic, evocative of the inevitable fall from purity mandated by original sin which so obsesses Margaret White as her daughter grows into womanhood and begins to develop adult feelings and needs. And yet King knew that in high school people often are known by their nicknames, or abbreviations of their name, and he did not call his novel Carrietta White, but simply *Carrie*. Would the novel have been as popular had it been called Annabelle, or Lucy? Again, who knows. Yet last year a low-budget horror film called *Annabelle* grossed \$256 million, while

a science fiction film called *Lucy* took \$458 million.

## EMPHATIC POWER

Names have power. Some names are more memorable than others. And some names just fit. It is not enough to have a great name, if must be the right great name, one which resonates unforgettably in the imagination. Victor Frankenstein – named after Castle Frankenstein, which Mary Shelley saw while on holiday – Count Dracula, Sherlock Holmes, Luke Skywalker. Indeed, names are especially important when writing science fiction or fantasy, where every invented detail goes towards establishing the texture and veracity of the imaginary universe. George Lucas had a particular genius for names when he wrote the original *Star Wars*, inventing not just one, but a whole galaxy of memorable names: Han Solo, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, R2D2, C3PO, Darth Vader, Obi Wan Kenobi, Jabba The Hutt. What other film has introduced so many iconic, yet original names? It is not a universe in which a James Bond, or an Elizabeth Bennet, Scarlett O'Hara or a John Smith could fit.

This brings us to the point of considering cultural appropriateness. For a realistic novel or story set in the real world, names should be appropriate to the culture and time in which they are set. And yet within this, there is still a range of variability – names may be entirely realistic, or, depending on the tone of the story, they may take on some symbolic, or ironic, or comic aspect. A writer would be remiss to give characters in a serious historic novel blatantly comedic names – such an approach would undermine the sensibility of the novel and mean that readers would, quite literally, not be able to take it seriously. One would not put Ford Prefect, even less Slartibartfast, into a novel like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or *The English Patient*. Yet these names, one a sly joke, the other very silly (and a little bit rude), work perfectly in Douglas Adam's *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. His hero's name, Arthur Dent, is the mundane, everyday comedic equivalent of Fleming's macho spy's name – imagine, the name's Dent, Arthur Dent. What works in surreal comedy would fall flat in the hyper-glamourised fantasy of espionage.

And the Bond books themselves are a kind of fantasy, an impossibly glamorous and hedonistic escape into luxury, casual sex and adventure which set a Britain still coming out of the shadow of austerity and the hardships of the post-WW2 world alight. If not actually fantastical, kitchen-sink realism was not the issue, and so with tongue-in-cheek Fleming gave Bond's enemies and lovers gloriously larger-than-life names. Auric Goldfinger (Auric means relating to or derived from gold) and Ernst Stavro Blofeld were not the names of chaps you would meet down the pub; they would barely seem out of place in a Sherlock Holmes adventure. And as for Bond's women? Who can keep a straight face thinking recalling Dr No's Honeychile Rider (Honey Rider in the film), Pussy Galore, or names invented by later screenwriters yet entirely within the parameters established by Fleming: Plenty O'Toole, Mary Goodnight, Holly Goodhead, or Xenia Onatopp, names filled with dangerous degrees of innuendo.

## CHECK FOR OVERLAPS

The choices are yours, and depend on the story of story you are writing, whether the names of your characters should be entirely realistic, have elements of symbolism or humour, or be completely fantastical. There are, however, some things to keep in mind. It is always a good idea to do a quick online search to make sure you haven't inadvertently used a name only a handful of other people in the world have. One of them may one day decide you were writing about them. And it will take a little more effort, but some additional searching can reveal whether names you have chosen have unfortunate meanings in other languages.

You should be mindful that names you chose should make sense for the class, location and historical period of your characters. And if you are including characters of a different cultural or historical background to your own, take steps to be as sure as possible that the names you chose are appropriate to the class and culture of the characters. Don't inadvertently give characters names which might be comical, insulting and racist, unless you are deliberately doing so for a particular reason, to make a

specific point. There are many websites where you can check names, or speak to someone from the appropriate culture.

Don't for example, treat the African continent as one homogenous mass – Africa is a continent comprised of many countries, just as Europe is. In the same way you would be unlikely to call a German character by an obviously English name, think beyond stereotypes. If you have a character from Algeria consider that their name may be a mix of Arab and French influences, while a South African's name could stem from tribal culture and/or Afrikaans. And don't forget that people marry and names mix and intertwine in unexpected ways, or that a popular name like Anita can be found in cultures around the world, being popular in the English and Spanish-speaking worlds, yet remaining a notable name in Greece, Holland, Hungary, India, Russia and other countries besides.

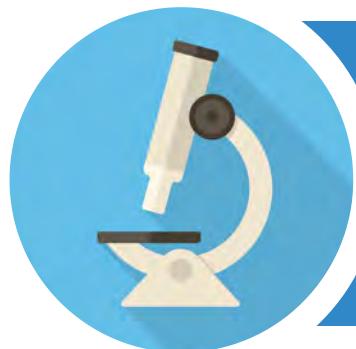
## FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITIES

If it is challenging to find names for real world characters, then there are no limits when it comes to fantasy and science fiction. For *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* JRR Tolkien created entire languages, and the names to go with them. His elves have entirely different sorts of names to his dwarves, his humans, his hobbits. Bilbo Baggins is comic, Galadriel, ethereal, Aragorn, noble, Sauron, reptilian, perhaps Satanic. There is a lot in a name, and if you are writing speculative fiction then the names you chose must match your world and feel linguistically at home within it. Han Solo would not work for the hero of *Blade Runner*, any more than Rick Deckard could plausibly be the name of a *Star Wars* rebel.

Naming characters is not easy, but get it right and the names you chose, or invent, could live in readers' imaginations forever. **W**

## USEFUL WEBSITES

- **Nameberry** allows random name searches, can suggest male or female names and has the Name Hunter feature to search for names by differing criteria: <http://nameberry.com>
- **Meaning of Names** explores the history and meaning of names from all cultures around the world: [www.meaning-of-names.com](http://www.meaning-of-names.com)
- **Wikipedia** has information about names, including numerous lists of names. <http://writ.rs/wikinamelists>
- **Name Generator & Name Generator 2** provide options for creating male and female names: [www.namegenerator.biz](http://www.namegenerator.biz); [www.namegenerator2.com](http://www.namegenerator2.com)



# Celebrity UNDER THE microscope

Author and lecturer **James McCreet** looks again at one of literary history's most famous 'bad novels'

Now largely derided due to the infamous opening passage we tackle here, Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) was an immensely popular writer in his own time. He published in an array of genres including romance, science fiction and poetry, and was responsible for coining several phrases which have now

become so common as to pass into cliché ('the pen is mightier than the sword', 'the almighty dollar'). He was also a good friend of Charles Dickens, often credited with persuading him to change the ending of *Great Expectations*. Why then has posterity been so unforgiving to Bulwer-Lytton? Read on...



## Paul Clifford by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

It was a dark and stormy night;<sup>1</sup> the rain fell in torrents,<sup>2</sup> except at occasional intervals,<sup>3</sup> when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets<sup>4</sup> (for it is in London that our scene lies)<sup>5</sup>, rattling along the house-tops,<sup>6</sup> and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness.<sup>7</sup> Through one of the obscurest quarters of London,<sup>8</sup> and among haunts little loved by the gentlemen of the police,<sup>9</sup> a man, evidently of the lowest orders,<sup>10</sup> was wending his solitary way.<sup>11</sup> He stopped twice or thrice<sup>12</sup> at different shops and houses of a description correspondent with the appearance of the quartier in which they were situated,<sup>13</sup> and tended inquiry<sup>14</sup> for some article or another<sup>15</sup> which did not seem easily to be met with.<sup>16</sup> All the answers he received were couched in the negative;<sup>17</sup> and as he turned from each door he muttered to himself, in no very elegant phraseology, his disappointment and discontent.<sup>18</sup> At length, at one house,<sup>19</sup> the landlord, a sturdy butcher, after rendering the same reply the inquirer had hitherto received,<sup>20</sup> added, "But if this vill do as vell, Dummie, it is quite at your service!"<sup>21</sup> Pausing reflectively for a moment, Dummie responded that he thought the thing proffered might do as well;<sup>22</sup> and thrusting it into his ample pocket, he strode away with as rapid a motion as the wind and the rain would allow.<sup>23</sup> He soon came to a nest of low and dingy buildings,<sup>24</sup> at the entrance to which, in half-effaced characters, was written "Thames Court." Halting at the most conspicuous of these buildings,<sup>25</sup> an inn or alehouse,<sup>26</sup> through the half-closed windows of which blazed out in ruddy comfort the beams of the hospitable hearth,<sup>27</sup> he knocked hastily at the door.<sup>28</sup> He was admitted by a lady of a certain age,<sup>29</sup> and endowed with a comely rotundity of face and person.<sup>30</sup>

**1** One of literature's most famous first lines... and not for good reasons. This meteorological opener is guilty of trying too hard in its earnest (but unsubtle) attempts to set the tone. Bulwer-Lytton might as well have written "It was a torrid and exciting novel..." From a purely narrative perspective, the writer is asking the reader to focus on the weather rather than the characters or storyline. (See a previous Celebrity Microscope in which Charles Dickens also opens with the weather in *Bleak House* but does so with a remarkable metaphorical flourish.)

**2** And the clichés begin. Clearly, the rain is not a torrent, as the very next clause makes clear. We might be tempted to query the semi-colon here, but such rules tend to change over time so we'll give him the benefit of the doubt.

**3** So the torrent has intervals. Isn't that a mixed metaphor? It's also like one of those descriptions that starts, 'He was absolutely naked, apart from...'

**4** Okay, the wind is blowing the rain – but the rain is still falling somewhere, presumably in the same torrential volume.

**5** This remarkable, almost parodic, parenthetical aside arrives like an afterthought, as if the location of

the story is somehow irrelevant beside the storm being floridly described. In the hands of Vladimir Nabokov, such a technique would be a sly nose-thumbing at the norms of narration, but here it just looks awkward.

**6** And the weather continues. It's not entirely clear where the rattling is coming from (loose tiles?) but we do pause to wonder at the reference to 'house-tops' rather than 'roofs' or 'rooftops'. Perhaps the distinction is historical.

**7** Take another look at this single, prodigious sentence. It begins with the night, moves into a description of the rain, then (via a relative clause) a description of the wind, then (via another relative clause) to the flames of the lamps: four foci in one sentence. Quasi-personification sees the rain checked, the wind rattling and the flames struggling. We have such adjectives as 'dark', 'stormy', 'violent' and 'scanty' alongside the adverb 'fiercely'. It all amounts to the most purple of purple prose – an overload of overwriting which waves its arms in a hectic semaphore of intent that's more powerful than intended effect.

**8** The location is mentioned again, pretty much negating that previous parenthesis. We're told that

the locale is obscure, but this doesn't really help us to picture or conceive it.

**9** The ornativeness of the description would be charming if its convolutions didn't also seem inadvertently comic. We know the author intends us to perceive the scene as dramatic (why else the stirring nocturnal weather?) and so this verbosity looks like bad writing. True, the period and the publishing norms of the time encouraged prolixity, but we have to consider tonal consistency.

**10** This isn't too bad. The contemporary reader would have been able to visualise a man of the lower orders.

**11** Wending one's way is a gross cliché, at least to modern ears. What's more concerning is how the focus of the sentence – the man – is lost in a salad of clauses.

**12** The rhyme of 'twice' and 'thrice' would probably be edited out nowadays.

**13** What a description! The houses looked like the kind of houses you'd expect to find in such an area. It's wordy and yet simultaneously devoid of specificity.

**14** 'Asked.'

**15** Is the vagueness suspenseful or just vague?

**16** Another masterstroke of circuitous phraseology. This is flowery even by early Victorian standards.

**17** Especially when the next sentence is essentially tautologous, glossing the previous line just in case the reader hadn't got it. Also, we're told 'all' the answers were negative, but he's called only twice or thrice.

**18** Again, it's clear what's happening, but the circumlocutional phraseology is almost laughably excessive. It's

like a game in which the simplest action must be rendered in the most roundabout manner.

**19** A simply awful repetition of 'at'. A new paragraph would provide a welcome breath.

**20** More astounding verbosity, this time with four separate clauses before we get to 'added'.

**21** We won't question the form of speech here. Much of Dickens' transcription of London dialects is equally hard to swallow. But we should note how desperately this first bit of dialogue makes us wish there had been some previously to reduce the verbiage and raise the pace.

**22** And it makes us wonder why this next line is in reported speech when direct speech would have been so much more engaging. It's as if the author simply won't relinquish his iron grasp on the narrative.

**23** Another mention of the weather, just in case we'd

forgotten it, along with the reinforcing measure of pointing out it's so bad that it prevents him from walking properly.

**24** A nice bit of description here. 'Nest' evokes the messy and temporary nature of such dwellings.

**25** We're told the building is the most conspicuous, but not why. It's a classic example of the words getting in the way of the image.

**26** And this doesn't help much.

**27** Has anybody spotted the subject of this sentence yet? At least there's that cack-handed alliteration of the 'hospitable hearth' to entertain us as we wait.

**28** Ah, here's the subject: 'he'. I think we can assume 'hastily' means 'rapidly.'

**29** Surely one of the most pointless descriptive phrases.

**30** 'Fat'.

## IN SUMMARY

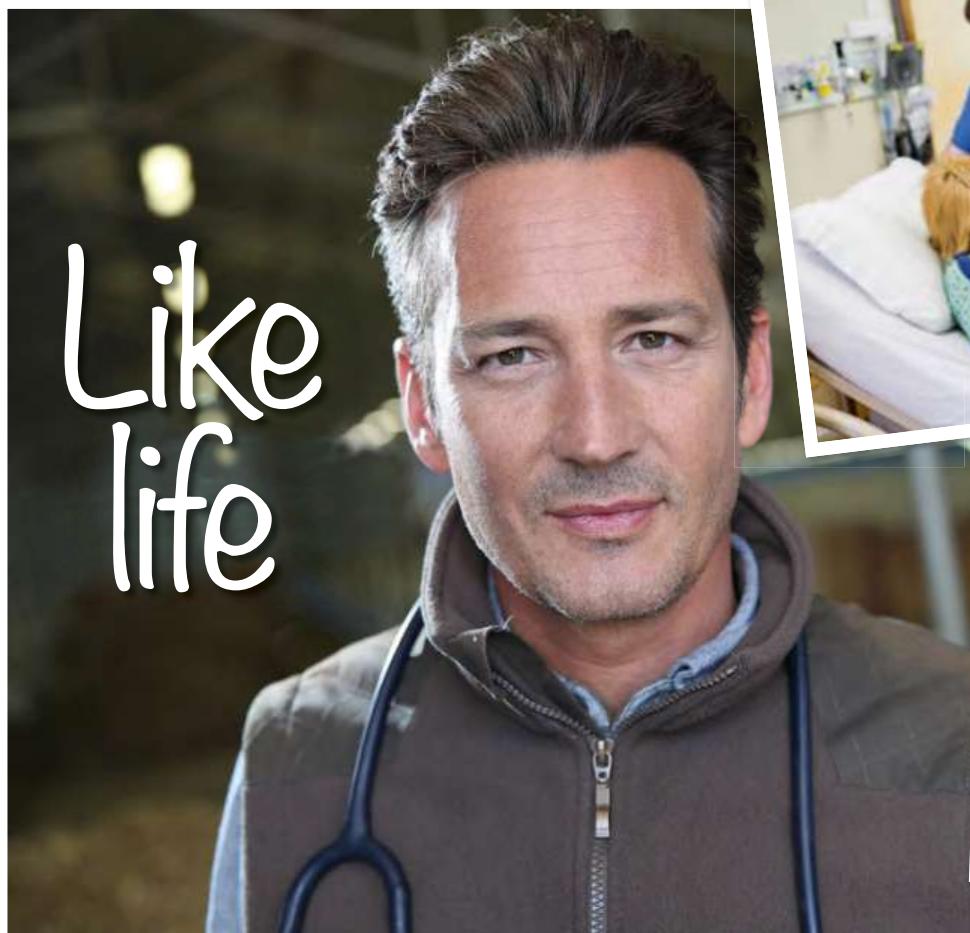
When does a cliché become a cliché? Is there an initial instance when a word or phrase goes unnoticed but then becomes tired with overuse and finally laughable? If so, Bulwer-Lytton must have been the one to start quite a few clichés.

What's more likely is that cliché is born out of a certain literary mentality: the writer who is inexact, poorly read and, frankly, not very good. Even if Bulwer-Lytton was the first to use such phrases, they sound hackneyed straightaway because they fail to evoke true sensations. They're wooden, predictable, lazy.

Astoundingly, *Paul Clifford* was a massive commercial success. Its first edition had the biggest print run of its era and sold out in a day. People loved it. Part of the appeal may be ascribed to the wordiness of fiction of that time, but also – as today – to the low critical standards of the mass market. Dickens has survived as a paragon of Victorian writing (albeit often preachy and mawkish), whereas Bulwer-Lytton has become a byword for hackery and purple prose.

The lessons are clear, whatever the period. Be clear; know your focus; understand your reader; avoid cliché; manage your sentence structure. And it never hurts to throw in a paragraph break now and then, if only to give the eyes a rest.

- If you would like to submit an extract of your work in progress, send it by email, with synopsis and a brief biog, to: [jtelef@writersnews.co.uk](mailto:jtelef@writersnews.co.uk)



# Like life



Feel free to walk the line between fiction and non-fiction in personal memoirs, suggests **Jane Wenham-Jones**

I am currently writing a book of funny and/or touching anecdotes about my time as a social worker from the mid 1970s to 1992.

Obviously I am fictionalising the place and names of clients. Although all the central incidents actually occurred, either to myself or colleagues, I am using a lot of poetic licence, either to make the book more entertaining or because my memory is failing me.

My query is this: would the book be classed as non-fiction or fiction? I have often marvelled at the seeming infallibility of the memories of authors of autobiographies. Surely they use poetic licence but how much is acceptable?

KATH DELANEY  
Lancaster

The short answer, Kath, is that it's your book and whether it is ultimately marketed as fiction or non-fiction is entirely in your hands. Whichever route you take, I would say it's a great premise.

I am endlessly fascinated by any glimpse into the lives and jobs of others – particularly when they are serving sections of the community.

I'd always be drawn to the memoir of a policewoman, prison governor, nurse, or social worker – simply because we think we can imagine what it is to be on the sharp end of public service, but often we have no real grasp of the day-to-day reality of these immensely challenging roles.

And judging from the massive success of authors like Jennifer Worth (*Call the Midwife*), Cathy

Glass (the bestselling series about fostering) and Pam Weaver (the memoirs of a nursery nurse in the 1960s), I am not alone.

However, as you have realised, one needs to be careful when recounting real life events, particularly in a sensitive area like social work, so yes it is sensible, nay crucial, to change places and names and to ensure that any potentially identifying details are well disguised. For your own sake as well as for others.

For this reason, to declare your project a work of fiction may well be safer and easier. You can still make it clear you are an ex-social worker yourself when you write your publicity material, contact an agent, or hold forth in an interview, and indeed be open about the fact that the contents were "inspired by"

your time in the profession. This will give you, as an author, both gravitas and a marketing hook, and ensure potential readers know they will be in safe, knowledgeable hands.

You can then use as much poetic licence as you like. Many novelists draw on events and incidents they have experienced themselves – I know that in all my books I do – which they then tweak to fit the plot.

Which brings me onto the first big question you have to ask yourself. Have you got one? Because if this book is going to be marketed as fiction, that makes it a novel and if you are going to set about writing one of those, a plot is something it will need.

'Books without plots are like bodies without skeletons,' I remember the bestselling Katie Fforde telling me long ago. 'Very unstable!'

A novel will need to be a story. One that hangs together, with a beginning, a middle, an end, and a journey for the main characters with a conflict that needs resolving – not just a string of anecdotes.

A memoir, on the other hand, can indeed be a series of cases and client interactions, remembered and commented on – in chronological or subject order, however you choose to do it – and you can make a feature of the fact that these are all 'true life'.

Or you could aim for a halfway house. Have you ever read the fabulous, classic James Herriot books? You might like to revisit them if so, or treat yourself if you never did. Herriot was a pseudonym – the author's real name was Alf Wight. But he really was a vet in the Yorkshire Dales and his books are indeed a series of touching or funny anecdotes. But because of the cast of characters throughout – his boss Siegfried, Siegfried's brother Tristan and his girlfriend-then-wife Helen, for example – and his own personal development from a young, inexperienced, newly-qualified

veterinarian to an accepted member of the community, taking in his meeting with his future spouse, and the progress in veterinary science during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, they are as readable, engaging and satisfying as any novel.

A quick peek at Amazon reveals that the Herriot books are categorised as non-fiction or memoir, but I understand that a great deal of poetic

licence was used and that his son reveals in his biography of his father that the timings and details were often changed. And why not? Like you, I am constantly amazed at the apparently infallible memories of those penning autobiographies and memoirs. I can barely

picture what happened yesterday. But I'm quite sure that even if detailed diaries have been kept or the authors have elephantine recall, plenty of embellishment, readjustment and seasoning is employed to, as you say, make the tales more entertaining.

It is only what we all do when regaling our friends with what happened when the car broke down, the cat attacked the postman or his mother came to stay. It's what being a raconteur is all about.

You don't say how far along you are with your manuscript but if it's only in its early stages I think I would be inclined not to worry too much about the genre right now, but have some fun, writing down as much as you can remember and then seeing what you can do with it.

Our job as writers is to entertain, grip our readers and provide a rip-roaringly good read. So to that end, as long as names have been changed to protect the innocent or guilty, and nobody is going to be hurt or mortified, then I would follow that fine old journalist's mantra and not let the facts get in the way of a good story! The end result will probably give you your answer better than I ever could.

Good luck. And do let me know when I can buy a copy... **W.M.**



## Novel Ideas

**Lynne Hackles** helps you find what turns you on – literally, not literally

**W**hat turns you on? No. Not that. I'm talking ideas here. If you know what turns you on then you'll know what to look for if you get stuck for inspiration.

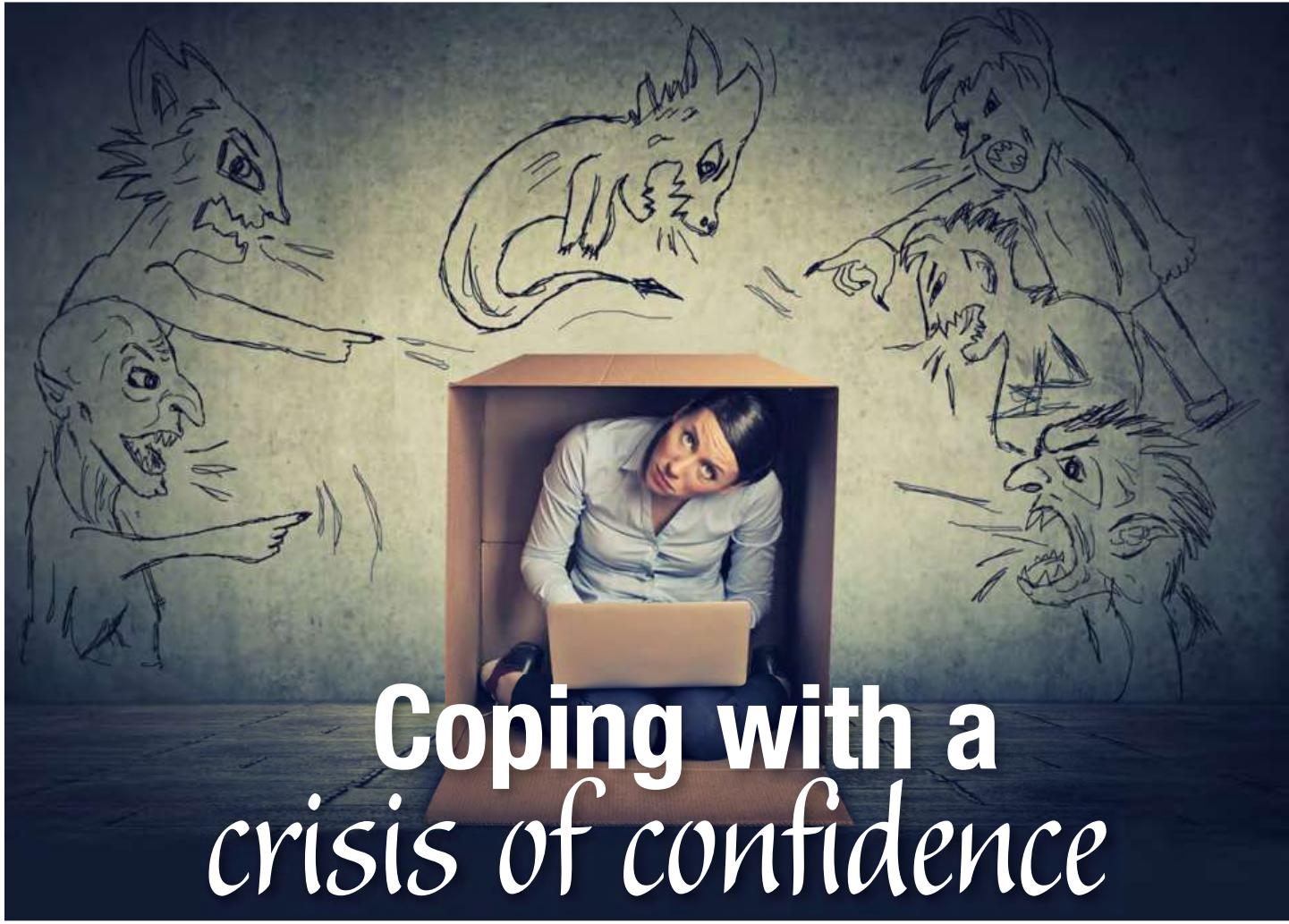
Take Betty. She zooms in on dialogue so, if she's stuck for a story idea, she can go out and socialise, which is something she's extremely good at. All she needs to do is listen to other people talking and she hears ideas. At an evening wedding party she overheard the bride say she always had her wedding cakes made at the same place. Snippets like these cry out to be used.

Some people need to commune with nature and take long walks to clear their heads and make space for new ideas. New places, be they countryside, scenery, old houses or festivals of any type can inspire. How could a first-ever visit to the stones at Avebury fail to inspire?

Maybe you need to read to get inspiration. I once read a collection of short fiction – *Encounters* by Barbara Erskine – and resolved to get an idea from each of her stories. Don't worry. I didn't copy anything. Think of it like this. Someone mentions the war and it sets you off on one of your father's or grandfather's memories. Or there's mention of a haunted mirror and you come up with a haunted handbag.

It's the same with magazines. One tiny thing in a published story can start you thinking along similar lines. It's about a childhood incident and you remember something that happened in your past that you can use. Don't forget that lots of your past may be tucked away in old photograph albums.

Decide what works for you and then seek it out, whether it be scenery, the great outdoors, old houses, people and conversation, books or magazines. Whatever turns you on. **W.M.**



# Coping with a crisis of confidence

Dark nights and negative thoughts can quash a writer's confidence.

**Simon Whaley** finds two writers who've trained their demons into submission

They make the most of the darker winter nights, when we're sitting at our desks, alone, pondering. They lurk at the back of our heads, waiting to pounce. All they need to whisper is one short sentence: *are you sure that's good enough?* Immediately, our confidence collapses. Is our writing any good, or is it complete drivel? When novelist Sarah Walters offered advice in the *Guardian* to other writers she told of the 'bowel-curdling terror' she experiences about half way through writing her novels. Confidence crises happen to us all.

Our creativity is a blessing and a curse. It gives us the ideas for the stories, novels, books, articles and poetry we crave to write, but it also gives life to the despondent thoughts of inferiority that can stop us in our tracks. Overcoming that crisis of confidence is the only way to see a project through to its fruition. The best way to tame those demons is acknowledging that such crises are a normal part of the business of writing.

## Success feels a fluke

'I have confidence crises with my writing all the time,' says *WM*'s writing groups columnist Julie Phillips. 'My inner naysayer is always telling me, even though I've had lots of articles and short stories published, that I won't have anything published again. It was just a fluke and I'm about to be found out for the fraud that I am.'

When a confidence crisis strikes, all rationality disappears. Our fears overwhelm us, even though there's no logical reason for our negative thoughts. We imagine the worst, because that's what we're good at: imagining.

'Intuitively,' says Julie, 'I know this all sounds absolutely ridiculous, but after a couple or six rejections, even though I've had some success, the naysayer seems to shout louder, drowning out all reason.'

Rejection plays an important part here, because rejection hurts. Our demons are trying to protect us from that bruising. Why hurt ourselves with further rejection? But as Julie explains,



**Glynis Scrivens:**

'I keep a notebook to remind me of the bright patches. It has a rainbow cover and contains unexpectedly lovely writing experiences. I always know when I'm in a bad patch that it's a dark bit of the tapestry. The next bright patch is just an email away.'

if you listen to those demons you might find writing becomes almost impossible.

'I've been trying to crack a couple of women's magazines that carry fiction, with no joy. Consequently, every time I begin to write a short story aimed at these markets, I sometimes freeze. My inner naysayer starts growling at me, asking me what's the point in starting a story when it's only going to be rejected?'

Bigger writing projects often create bigger confidence crises. When Julie secured a three-book deal to produce some local history books her confidence reached new heights. But as her first deadline loomed ever closer the demons began whispering their negative thoughts. 'My biggest crisis of confidence came at the very end of the process, when I was printing the manuscript out and putting the images on disc to post off. Even though I had checked, double-checked, treble-checked and then checked a few more times after that, I was convinced my work wasn't good enough and that it was riddled with errors. I felt sick! Had I remembered to

include that vital piece of information? Had I broken any copyright rules? Had I labelled the images correctly? Was my work good enough for the publisher?

Julie's solution was to look at the contract. 'I worked hard to get that contract and the publisher had confidence in my abilities to write the books, so I should have the confidence too.' Finding the logical evidence that proves our negative demons wrong is a good way to move forward.

## Edit away the demons

Glynis Scrivens is an Australian writer, whose new book, *Edit Is A Four-Letter Word*, has just been published. But at one point she thought it might never happen. I've heard of authors having a crisis halfway through writing a novel, but it never occurred to me this could happen with a non-fiction book. After all, I'd mapped out the plan of the book and had set aside a week each month to write a chapter. I came unstuck when I tried to write what I'd always known would be the hardest section. The chapters on punctuation and grammar didn't seem to fit in with the style of the rest of the book and were in danger of becoming terminally boring. I'd assumed that with four or five chapters under my belt I'd manage without too much trouble, but I lost momentum altogether. Come the end of that month, I had to face the reality that the chapter wasn't written, and that what I'd produced was terrible.'

It's at moments like this when it's worth turning to friends for support. 'I confided in two writing friends,' says Glynis, 'and let them remind me this was do-able. And I reread Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, which gives permission to write a "shitty first draft". It didn't have to be perfect, just done.'

Her book's subject matter also helped her through the process. We know it's important to edit our work, but how much editing do we need to do? How many drafts are necessary? What's the difference between editing and rewriting? When does rewriting stop and editing start? These can be the triggers that wake our negative demons. To answer those questions, Glynis interviewed several writers for their thoughts on the topic. Their responses now struck a chord with her.

'I reread the experiences of the writers I'd interviewed for the book.

They'd all struggled in one way or another. It helped me see the situation in a new light. This was not a personal crisis, but simply a well-worn path trod by many others like me. Coming unstuck was normal. So was persevering.'

It also reminded her of her duty. 'Rereading these also made me see more clearly how generous they'd been in sharing their experiences. I felt I owed them the best I could manage. This realisation gave me a second wind.'

## Who else is involved in your project?

Remembering that others have a stake in your work can be a way of putting things into perspective. Julie experienced something similar with her book *Ludlow in the Great War*. 'Because some families of those who fought and died in the war have been so generous with their information, photographs and help, I wanted to get the book right for them and for the memory of those poor lads who died.' Those interviewees galvanised her to stop fretting and make her submission.

Glynis's confidence crisis also made her stop and review her project. Sometimes, getting bogged down in the detail blinds us to the overall aim of our project. 'This onset of doubt sent me back to the basics,' she says. 'Who was I writing the book for? What did they need? With this in mind, I felt free to let the book go in a new direction, quite different from what I'd originally planned. This meant putting in a new section – Putting the Theory into Practice. A lot of writers reading the book will experience their own crisis of confidence. This new section is for them. It shows a writer crying over editing challenges, a well-known novelist going through her new work thirty times, and short story writers having to make drastic changes to story length.'

## Crises are normal

Working alone means there's no one to stop us making a drama out of a confidence crisis, but the sooner we accept they're a normal part of the business of writing, the easier it becomes to acknowledge them for what they are: periods of self-doubt.

It can be more difficult when the confidence crisis is created by a third party. 'I suggested an article on



### **Julie Phillips:**

'The best way I know of overcoming the wobbles, that works for me, is to keep writing.'

Get yourself over that hump, because life is much easier over the other side on the downward slide!'

rocking chairs,' Glynis recounts, 'to a magazine which often uses whimsical general health pieces. The editor loved the idea. It was a surprise when she asked me to do the article more as a scientific piece, full of case studies and quotes from experts. But the customer is always right, so I did what I was told. Then, without referring back to me, she changed her mind and asked a staff writer to adapt what I'd written into something quirky and gentle – the piece I'd wanted to write all along! It felt like a slap in the face.'

The best course of action is to step out of our writer's garret, either physically or virtually, and connect with other writers. Fighting those demons on our own is hard work, but it's much easier with friends who understand.

'I confided again in these two writing friends,' Glynis continues, 'who showed me how to see this in a different perspective, that I was better off without an editor like that. One also reminded me that editors come and go. I should save my future ideas for her successor. I'll also take revenge in a story. These bad feelings might as well be channelled constructively. She won't be the first editor I've killed off in a story!'

Ironically, a crisis of confidence can be positive. As Julie says: 'It means you care, as a writer, about your work and that you want it to be the very best it can be.' There's nothing wrong with that. And as Glynis points out: 'It's painful going through a crisis in confidence, but often the outcome is positive and makes the suffering worthwhile in the long run.'

The next time your negative demons wake up, try to remain calm. It's possible to send them to sleep again. Think logically. Remind yourself that such doubts are part of the normal writing process. It means you care about your work and how readers will think about your creation. These crises form part of the everyday business life of a writer, and may never disappear, no matter how successful we become.

Glynis finds this reassuring. 'I've recently interviewed Venero Armano, who heads the creative writing department of the University of Queensland and who has won awards for his novels. He still has crises in confidence. It's nice to know I'm in very good company.' **W**



WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN ABOUT...

## Going freelance

Keir Thomas speaks to three veteran freelance journalists to find out what they've learned since their early days

There are perhaps two routes to becoming a freelance writer. The first is to take up with a newspaper or other publication after getting qualifications, and eventually making a break. The second route is to simply take the plunge following a career in a completely different industry – or even while simultaneously holding down a day job elsewhere. The three writers we've gathered around our virtual round table this month fall into the latter camp and all came to journalism through non-traditional routes.

Donna-Louise Bishop held down a job as a 999 emergency call handler while starting a freelance writing career, and this led to her present position as senior reporter with the *Eastern Daily Press*. As a freelancer her work appeared in *Norfolk Magazine* and the Push university guides, and she's written for various charities including the Teenage Cancer Trust and CALM. She blogs at <https://newshoundnovelist.wordpress.com>

Graeme Mason ([www.wizwords.net](http://www.wizwords.net)) has been a freelance journalist for five years, although maintains a foot in the family business of shipping. He assumed the mantle of professional writing after submitting reader reviews for *PC Gamer* magazine and now writes regularly for *Retro Gamer*, *GamesTM*, American title *RETRO*, and the popular gaming website Eurogamer. He also works closely with Revival Retro on their line of retro-gaming books.

The third and final of our freelancers is Andrea Wren, a former social worker who has written for publications such as the *Guardian* – where she had a regular column about blogging – as

well as *The Independent*, *Times T2*, *North West Business Insider* and more. She recently published *The Ultimate Guide to Landing the Big Commission*, is researching a media-related PhD, and blogs about stretching your comfort zone at <http://butterflyist.com> as well as vegan cookery at [www.chocolateandbeyond.co.uk](http://www.chocolateandbeyond.co.uk)

### The first job

Every journey starts with a single step, and every freelance career surely starts with an initial commission. How did our writers go about getting theirs?

'I pitched to editors after working out which type of articles they were particularly desperate for,' says Graeme, who learned *Retro Gamer* magazine had a certain type of in-depth feature few people wanted to write. 'These are hard work to research and write but I knew they represented a good opportunity, so I wrote several within my first year.'

Donna agrees with this approach: 'I researched a lot, kept my ear to the ground and grabbed every opportunity. I worked as a book researcher for a number of years just to gain experience in publishing and reporting. I was bored but I learnt a lot.'

Andrea recommends a book: *The Renegade Writer: A Totally Unconventional Guide to Freelance Writing Success*, by Linda Formichelli and Diana Burrell: 'This was my bible and I'm pretty certain one of the key things that helped me get my

first assignments.'

'I think I thought it would be a lot harder to get work published than it was,' continues Graeme. 'Fortunately I had some work published voluntarily and also wrote a blog, so editors could see that I at least had half a clue.'

'People can fall into the trap of thinking they have to start small,' says Andrea. 'Pay their dues, so to speak. I entered the freelancing world without that thought process and I just started pitching the big guns straight away. I was writing for national press such as the *Guardian* extremely early in my writing career because of this.'

Donna sounds a note of warning: 'People are ready to take advantage of people gaining experience in the business. The amount of people who didn't pay me, or paid me far less than what was deserved, was shocking. Don't be afraid of charging what you are worth. At the same time don't be unrealistic.'



**“ “**  
*Don't be afraid of charging what you are worth. At the same time don't be unrealistic.*

DONNA-LOUISE BISHOP

### Going pro

It's very telling that, despite his prolific output, Graeme still describes himself as a part-time writer. Donna also kept up her day job.

'When I started freelance work it didn't pay the bills,' she says. 'I never did find the confidence to make the leap. My main worry was not earning enough money. However, I think if you get a few good contacts under your belt

to pitch to, then that's half the battle.'

Andrea emphasises the importance of planning: 'There were ten months from the point of making a decision to be a writer before I went full-time. I reduced my hours in my job to four days a week so that I could work on journalism and find out how to be self-employed. I spent literally all my extra time outside of my job working on building my freelance career, and my social life ground to a complete halt. I also started saving my salary and establishing a safety net fund – not too hard since I wasn't going out anywhere!'

'I guess I can describe myself as a journalist now which feels a bit odd,' adds Graeme. 'At the start it felt like arriving at a party where everybody else knew each other but no one knew me. I'm still learning all the time.'

'When I actually started telling people I was a journalist I felt like a fraud!' says Andrea. 'I'd had no journalism training and was suddenly writing for national newspapers. But at the same time I knew that sheer determination and hard work had got me there, so I was proud.'

'Even calling myself a journalist,' says Donna, 'whether it was full-time, part-time, for a national or a tiny not-for-profit, gives me goose bumps every time!'

### Learning process

Unsurprisingly our freelance journalists have advice aplenty for rookie writers, most of which is hard-earned.

'Don't submit work until you have been officially commissioned,' is Graeme's first piece of wisdom. 'And I certainly don't believe that "write what you know" claptrap. You can write about anything if you research it properly. But other than that, the key elements for me are writing readable and entertaining copy, within word limits, and on time! Magazines are run on a very tight schedule so, for an editor, having reliable writers is very important.'

'Freelance journalism is about being able to market yourself,' says Andrea. 'Learn how to be great at pitching and making your ideas sell themselves, and how to chase an editor without annoying them. Lose your fear of the phone. It's the person that makes an effort to phone an editor to see if they received their idea that stands out from other freelancers.'

'Get yourself a blog,' says Donna. 'Send out a few tweets on Twitter. If's

the era of online. Take advantage of it.'

She also recommends learning shorthand, if you can, and all three writers emphasise the importance of good spelling and grammar: 'They're the tools every good writer needs,' says Donna.

### Better or worse

'I know it's a cliché,' says Donna, when asked to summarise the best aspect of freelance writing, 'but you are your own boss. You make your own hours and you charge your own fees. You also get to pick, most of the time, the topics you want to write about.'

Andrea agrees: 'The best part of freelancing is the independence and freedom, for sure. The attraction of freelance journalism was doing something I loved, in my own time, under my own control and with the ability to focus on areas that I enjoyed writing about. Also, I really wanted to work from home. I loathed commuting!'

In the specialised field of retro computing in which Graeme works he says one of the best aspects is 'getting good feedback from people who really know about the subject,' although he's also happy with the simple pleasure of 'getting publishing and seeing work in print'.

'Freelancing can be lonely,' says Andrea, when asked about the flipside of the freelance journalism coin. 'Especially when you have several deadlines and you have to hole yourself up for days to complete them. But I've always enjoyed the solitude of working for myself and am more productive when working from home. Having a dog has helped me, getting out at lunchtime for a walk.'

Graham agrees that it can sometimes be a lonely job: 'To alleviate the loneliness I often write in coffee shops. I know it's a terrible cliché but I think I sometimes write better with people around me, even if they're making a lot of noise.'

'Social media helps,' adds Donna. 'There are plenty of other freelancers out



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*When I actually started telling people I was a journalist I felt like a fraud! But at the same time I knew that sheer determination and hard work had got me there, so I was proud.*

ANDREA WREN

there who want to reach out too.'

However, for Donna the ultimate downside of freelance writing is money – 'the worry of when the next cheque is coming through the letterbox.'

### Recommendation

Some have suggested that in the age of the internet the bar for what passes for journalism has been set too low, making any kind of full-time writing career difficult if not impossible. Do our writers agree?

'There's a massive difference between a blogger and a journalist,' says Donna. 'Don't ever let anyone tell you differently. Yes, everyone can be a writer, but not everyone can be a good writer.'

Graeme says it's a difficult question to answer: 'Journalism has definitely become devalued due to the vast amount of people who are now able, via the internet, to pitch for online work with little effort. However, most of these people will never work for print media as that tends to be a bit more discerning over the type of writers it hires. So I for one hope print continues to live on.'

Andrea also thinks it's an issue:

'Sites like Elance – where writers from very low-income parts of the world bid for work, and can complete projects for pennies – don't help those who live in countries that have a high cost of living, and therefore need to earn more.'

However, despite all this Donna recommends a freelance writing lifestyle provided 'you have the drive, organisation and support from loved ones'.

'It's a tough job,' says Andrea, 'but there are still people doing it. More than ever you have to be seriously determined today, though.'

Graeme recommends the job as a part-time career but 'as a full time job I don't think it pays enough when you're starting out at my age – 37 when I started – with a family and mortgage.' **W**



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*I certainly don't believe that 'write what you know' claptrap. You can write about anything if you research it properly.*

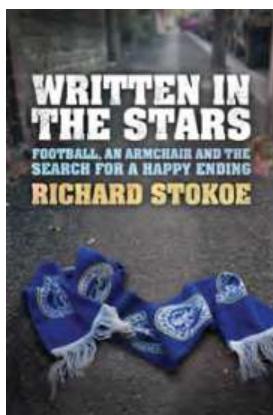
GRAEME MASON



# SUBSCRIBER SPOTLIGHT

Share your writing success stories. If you subscribe to *Writing Magazine* and would like to feature here, email Tina Jackson, [tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk](mailto:tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk)

## What makes it such a beautiful game?



'It all began when I was introduced to the game of *Subbuteo* at the age of five,' writes subscriber Richard Stokoe.

'From that day on I developed a dependency upon football results that would threaten to control my life.'

'Writing has long been an interest of mine, and I've enjoyed writing music reviews for magazines and websites over the years. But, despite

several attempts, I had never actually managed to complete a novel or book. That changed with *Written In The Stars*. I found that once I started writing, the words just flowed. The book is, on the one hand, a memoir that documents my football experiences – as both an armchair fan and on the terraces of League and non-League football clubs – but also amounts to a unique summary of the recent history of Chelsea FC, who have been my team since my first frightening trip to see them play in 1984.'

'I started writing it partly to try to understand why football affects me, and other football fans, the way that it does; to work out how a life that is otherwise entirely normal, can be impinged upon by a game that you might not even be watching at the time. In that sense, it's worked. For anyone out there who is compelled by the need to check their phone every two minutes when out for the evening, or forced to vacate the living room when the pressure gets too much, you'll find much to relate to in *Written In The Stars*. And for those who have ever wondered why their friends or partners behave that way, it might just help you to understand. It is only a game after all.'

'Published by I\_AM Self-Publishing, *Written In The Stars* was released in the UK and US on 21st August, 2015.'

Website: [www.richstokoe.net](http://www.richstokoe.net)



## The play's the win

'In 2013 my short play *Brought to Book* was chosen as one of the six winners in Pint Sized Plays, one of the leading international competitions for plays under ten minutes,' writes subscriber Lou Treleaven.

'Last year I submitted again with *Mr Robertson's Blood Test* and was again chosen as a winning entry. This year I'm delighted to say that I have achieved a hat-trick with my play *Room in the Womb*.

'Winning plays are performed in pubs at Tenby Arts Festival as a way of bringing theatre to people who wouldn't normally go to one. (This should be interesting for the actors in *Room in the Womb*, who will have to play an egg and a sperm, the latter complete with flippers and snorkel mask.) Pub performances are followed by a script slam and an anthology of winning works which are then licensed for general performance. *Brought to Book* (voted best script by the audience at the script slam) and *Mr Robertson's Blood Test* are now in *Pint Sized Plays 3*, which is available to order through their website or from Samuel French.'

'I've also had my first full-length play accepted by Lazy Bee Scripts which had its debut performance in September. *Never Mind the Butler* is inspired by a certain famous TV period drama about life upstairs and downstairs in a country house, with a bit of Carry On style humour thrown in. You can read it for free on their website.'

Website: [www.loutreleaven.wordpress.com](http://www.loutreleaven.wordpress.com)



## Fly back in time

I have been a subscriber to WM for at least a couple of years – the best investment I ever made!' writes Ken Stallard.

'I have written short stories but I have no idea where to submit them for competitions. WM is a treasure trove of ideas and opportunities.'

'Back in the 1970s and 80s I had two religious books published: *Road to Nowhere* and *Give us this Day*. I have a wide readership and readers have for years encouraged me to write more. Consequently now that I am 77 years of age I decided to write about my experiences as a national serviceman with the RAF.'

'These amusing and challenging experiences appear in my latest book, *Rookie in the RAF*, and I would like to thank you for all the pleasure you give me through *Writing Magazine*'



Ken Stallard



## Secrets uncovered

'I have been writing crime/thriller novels for ten years and have just published my sixth novel as I enter my sixth decade,' writes subscriber Maureen Farenden.

'I started writing after a major car accident in 2005 when I realised that I hadn't done what I most wanted to do in life, write novels.'

'I worked as a librarian and so did an intensive survey on what readers wanted from and enjoyed in crime novels. I discovered that they liked storylines with quirky eccentric characters that delved into the darker side of human nature. They wanted stories that took them to the edge of their emotions and intertwined with their own lives, inner thoughts, turmoils and secrets. Many readers didn't want long descriptions, preferring to get inside the characters' mindsets through dialogue and action where they could visualise the story more intensely inside their own imagination.'

'In 2011 I moved to Hampshire and semi-retired so that I could concentrate on my writing, and got the idea for my sixth novel, *Spoken Lies & Buried Secrets*, whilst walking in the New Forest and moving from city life to a small village. It's a novel about buried secrets and lies and how the main protagonist, Martin Snow, has lived with a terrible secret for twenty years that implodes with catastrophic consequences upon his job, family and life. It's a story about regrets and redemption that will touch the heart of every reader as we all hide secrets within ourselves.'

*'Spoken Lies & Buried Secrets'* is available through Amazon in ebook and paperback.'



## Writing to please yourself



'Earlier this year I released the second title in my cosy mystery series: *Flora Lively and A Date With Death*', writes subscriber Joanne Phillips.

'The first book in the series, *Murder at the Maples*, has been incredibly popular with readers, and was featured in June by the awesomely powerful Bookbub. Every time

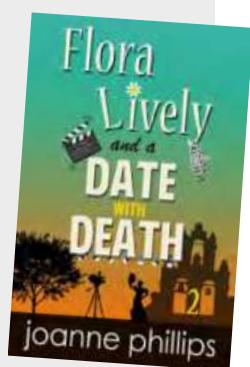
I've managed to get a title on Bookbub's list, that book has gone on to see increased sales, and it seems to work best of all for books in a series. The secret to getting featured seems to be to have a great cover, good reviews, and to cross your fingers and hope for the best!'

'My amateur sleuth, Flora Lively, has been described as "a modern day Jessica Fletcher", and it's true that *Murder; She Wrote* heavily influences my love of this genre. I love mysteries, but can't cope with gore or upsetting themes – it got even worse after I became a mum. They say you should write the kind of books you yourself would want to read, and that's certainly true of the Flora Lively series. An unexpected bonus has been that these books are very popular with library readers, and many of my paperback orders now come from libraries.'

'I'd never want to be typecast, though. I also write romantic comedies, with three published on Amazon already and another on the way, and have recently completed a literary novel for my masters in creative writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. That's one of the beauties of being indie, I suppose – you get to choose what you write, with no one standing over your shoulder demanding you keep on writing the same book over and over again.'

'*A Date With Death* is available on Kindle or in paperback.'

Website: [www.joannephillips.co.uk](http://www.joannephillips.co.uk)



## Word games



'My PhD was ethnographic – writing about the people,' writes subscriber Malcolm E Brown.

'I also possess a masters in natural science and a BA, all studied part-time. I am a retired pharmacist, experienced in hospitals, industry and community. I liaised with blue light services, trained representatives to sell to the NHS (gamekeeper turned poacher), audited intercontinentally and was keynote speaker at

The Hague introducing a multinational multidisciplinary conference.

'My book *Winning Words* argues that words are a writer's "stock-in-trade". Finding the right word in the right combination or the right phrase at the right point can mean the difference between success and failure. Stash away some *bon mots*; you never know when you will need them. Your commonplace books achieve that. Mine span forty years.'

'Trawl a few words from their depths. They can sprinkle stardust on an otherwise pedestrian offering.'

'Other sources included my sociological journal (spanning eighteen years) and journalistic maxims (eg "if it bleeds, it leads"). Awareness of the highest-ranking searches on Google, globally, added spice. 4,666 entries in 55 categories resulted, combining any two turbo boosts into 11 million pairings. If your writing place lacks such material, my book may assist. A quarter offers advice on "tactics".'

'How did I write it? Major rewriting followed early paid criticism.'

CreateSpace refused to format: too complex; I formatted myself. I taught myself Word 2003; the *Word 2003 Bible*, bought on eBay from an American hospice, aided. A retired professional printer proofread some chapters; I applied his criticism to those remaining. (Retired pharmacist) wife and (teacher) son proofread. 25 revisions later, I self-published. I paid for cover images, professional Kindle e-conversion and websites.

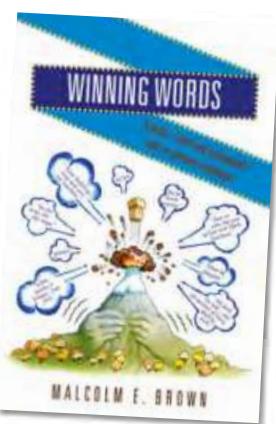
'Why did I write it? From my shelf, four decades of commonplace books pleaded, "Capitalise on us". I already had about a hundred publications.'

'This book is for: beginners, those wanting a head start; "techies" – who would not find it too "arty" – and literary writers willing to step out of their comfort zone into maths and science. There, low-hanging fruit wait.'

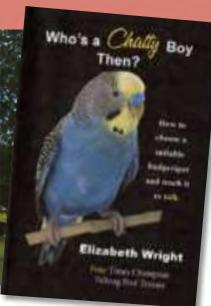
To order your copy of *Winning Words*, visit Malcolm's website:  
[www.malcolmebrown.co.uk](http://www.malcolmebrown.co.uk)

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Finding the right word in the right combination can mean the difference between success and failure.



## A little bird told me



'Having been the owner for 38 years of a pet centre that sold quality domestic pets, I was able to put my extensive experience of breeding, training and exhibiting popular birds into writing a commissioned book on budgerigars,' writes subscriber Elizabeth Wright.

The title is apt. *Who's a Chatty Boy Then?* gives readers complete guidance on choosing, training, taming and teaching to talk. Additional chapters cover some famous talented talking birds and include other species that have been found to imitate sounds and voices.

Many of my personal pet birds, budgies, parrots and cockatoos, have appeared in the media, including TV's *Blue Peter*, George Cansdale's *Pet Programme*, and *Children's Hour* on the radio. Over a period of seven years my talking birds won many awards at the National Exhibition of Cage Birds. I became known as "The Bird Lady of Eastbourne".

As the popularity of budgerigars as tame, talking pets is again on the up, Rex Sumner from MyVoice Publishing Ltd commissioned me to put together a book containing practical, useful guidelines to help prospective budgie owners make the right decisions on choosing suitable birds and teaching them to talk.

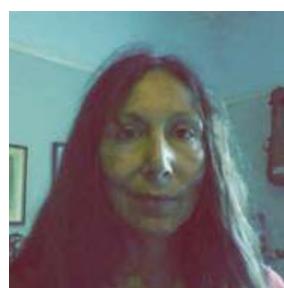
It took me six months to write this book; the e-version came out in January 2015 and as sales picked up *Who's a Chatty Boy Then?* stood at No 75 in Amazon's Top 100 Sellers in the 'Birds' category by the end of February. A paperback version soon followed and by 8 March that was ranked 49th, whilst the ebook had gone up to twelfth.

But the best was yet to come. Due to extensive promotion by MyVoice Publishing, the e-version of *Chatty Boy* reached #1 in Amazon's 100 Best Sellers in the 'Birds' category on 14 and 15 May.

My local paper, the *Eastbourne Herald*, picked up on this and over two weeks devoted three whole pages to my life story and the free publicity for *Chatty Boy* and my humorous autobiography *From Fancy Pants to Getting There* was incredible. All my books continue to sell well and we are now into profit. So writing about what I know paid off for me.'

**Website:** [www.elizabethwright-thewriter.com](http://www.elizabethwright-thewriter.com)

## Yew tell 'em



'My pseudo-Victorian fantasy novel, *Oy Yew*, is the first book in the Waifs of Duldred trilogy,' writes subscriber Ana Salote.

Mysterious accidents are happening to the waifs of Duldred Hall. Oy is the shy hero with hidden strengths. When he arrives at the hall the fight for survival begins. The book is suitable for middle grade and adult crossover readers. I've been pleased by the number of adult fans, and flattered by comparisons with *His Dark Materials* and *Gormenghast*.

*Oy Yew* was published in June thanks to a tip on Talkback, the Writers Online forum. Poet Liz Brownlee posted a call for submissions from small press, Mother's Milk. Till then *Oy Yew*'s submissions history had more ups and downs than Alton Towers. The full manuscript was requested many times by agents and publishers. It was longlisted for the *Times/Chicken House* prize. Walker Books asked to see it twice, wavered, and decided it didn't quite fit their list.

'With so many near misses I ran out of patience and self-published. Then I spotted Liz's post. I researched Mother's Milk and was drawn to its ethos. It's a small nurturing press just expanding into children's fiction. I submitted *Oy Yew* and it was quickly accepted.

I have worked closely with publisher Teika Bellamy, and am very pleased with the result. Professional editing, design and production, as well as help with promotion have been invaluable. I would encourage other writers to look closely at small presses before deciding to self-publish.

'I would also like to thank all the writers on Talkback who have been so supportive.'

**Website:** <http://anasalote.blogspot.co.uk/>



## Cat-tastic change of direction



'Having experimented with a couple of different genres since my early days of writing romcoms, it was a complete surprise to me to be contacted earlier this year by the fiction editors at Ebury Press (Penguin Random House), asking if I'd be interested in writing a special book for the Christmas market,' writes subscriber Sheila Norton.

'This was another change for me – a cat story. I'd worked with Gillian Green, head of fiction at Ebury, before, and she'd remembered that I was a cat lover as well as liking my style of writing. So it was very exciting, and a huge compliment, to be asked. The book they wanted – and which I've thoroughly enjoyed writing – is a "warm and uplifting story about a little cat with a big heart."

'The book is called *Oliver, the Cat Who Saved Christmas*, and it'll be available in hardback and ebook editions from 22 October. At only £9.99, the hardback book will, I think, make a lovely Christmas present, especially for any animal lovers. It's a warm and gentle story for those winter days ahead. And I hope my existing loyal readers will enjoy sampling another change of genre from me.'

'You can find out more, and keep up with my news, on my new website at [www.sheilanorton.com](http://www.sheilanorton.com)



## Life on Mars is murder



'I've always been fascinated by Mars,' writes subscriber Sheila Adams.

'Take the probability that it once supported life, add the fact that manned flights to the red planet are achievable and I let my imagination go wild in my third novel, *Deadly Deception*, a thrilling story of deception, murder and discovery on Mars.'

'The spark was a short story assignment for a creative writing course. My 'view from a window' was from a spaceship of pregnant women being evacuated to a scientific colony on Mars, escaping an asteroid on a collision course for Earth.'

'Recent unmanned missions to Mars confirmed there is water ice at the poles, and with a revival of interest in the press, I returned afresh to the story, wondering what if...'

'I came up with an astonishing deception uncovered by one of the mothers, targeted by someone who will stop at nothing to conceal the truth, and started the book with murder. Ten years later, Christa, a naïve Mars-born fifteen-year-old, finds a diary

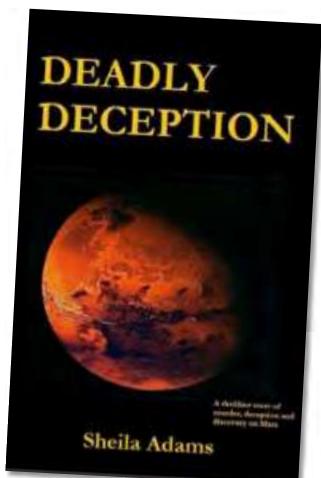
suggesting her mother's death was no accident. An incredible secret about Earth, amazing discoveries involving unknown artefacts, an innocent coming-of-age and the unmasking of a murderer – all these play out against the harsh environment of Mars.'

'Even though the book is a departure from my previous two novels, *Red Stiletto* and *Black Velvet*, light-hearted crime novels in the Rachel Hodges private detective series (published as paperbacks by Bredbury Books), the idea gripped me and wouldn't let go.'

'*Deadly Deception* has been launched initially as an ebook on Kindle, and is aimed at the young adult market, but should also appeal to fans of sci-fi and thrillers.'

'I'm currently working on the next novel in the Rachel Hodges series, *Green Silk*, endeavouring to ensure publication coincides with the 2016 City of Culture celebrations in Hull, my birthplace, where the series is set.'

**Website:** [www.bredburybooks.co.uk](http://www.bredburybooks.co.uk)



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## Strange happenings

'I had the most unusual, but lucky break with my latest novel *Mysterious Journey*,' writes subscriber Alec Price.

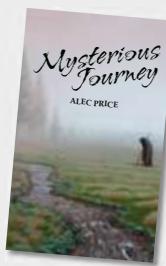
'I had written it as the prequel to my popular children's series of books, The Trogglybogs of Brinscall Moors. *Mysterious Journey* is aimed at eleven years and upwards and although it was originally intended to be the prequel it could be a story in its own right.'

'It tells of a witch from Lancashire, who by some quirky twist of fate is transported back to the time of King Arthur, where she and a companion help Arthur to defeat a terrible war lord called Bordagan.'

'By chance, a chap who is a director of a publishing company in Norfolk had gone into a shop that stocks my books and had seen my Trogglybogs on sale. He contacted me to say how much he liked them and ask what else I had in the pipeline. I told him I was pushing *MJ* around the literary agents and he asked to see a sample. Within a month they had asked me if I would like to sign a contract with them.'

'The book has been beautifully produced. The cover is amazing; the art work by Owen Claxton blew me away. The publishers, FBS-Publishing, have done an excellent job and the book is having some fantastic reviews. The Trogglybogs books were illustrated by a lady from Darwen, Eileen Briscoe, but apart from the cover there are no pictures in *Mysterious Journey*.

'I haven't started a follow up yet, but I will do soon. I am also a ghost-writer and I have been busy with a project for the past few months. Ghosting is something I like doing, and I am trying to find more work in that direction. But watch out for The Trogglybogs... They'll be back.' **Website:** [www.alecpricewrites.co.uk](http://www.alecpricewrites.co.uk)



## Nativity novelty

'An incident during a performance of a nativity play, in which my son was playing the part of a shepherd, gave rise to an idea for a children's story,' writes subscriber Monica Withrington.

'After many failed attempts to turn this into a short story, I realised that it needed to be much longer, with many more characters involved in the action.'

'With considerable encouragement and input from the writers' workshop I was attending at the time, plus the writing group of which I am currently the chairperson, I turned it into a 15,500-word novella for seven- to nine-year-olds (and their grown-ups), with the title *The Reluctant Shepherd*. It tells the story of nine-year-old Tim, who is convinced that he is too old to play the part of the middle shepherd in the school's nativity play, despite the fact that the head teacher of his tiny village school has insisted that every child has to participate.'

'Friends have supported me in every way imaginable, from formatting and uploading the manuscript (which is available in both Kindle and as a paperback), to buying it for themselves and their offspring and I have had some encouraging reviews. I also have a fan base in the form of a class of eight-year-olds at my local school, where I'm a volunteer, listening to individuals read. They were thrilled to discover that their "reading teacher" was also a writer.'

'I am in the process of editing my second novel for children. When her mother is seriously injured in an accident, twelve-year-old Kirsty suddenly finds herself in emergency foster care. She soon discovers that there is another care home next door, only this time the "foster children" are cats. I have had great fun following the antics of both the pre-teens in the story, and the kittens who bring comfort and solace to my heroine.'



## A long journey to publication

'In 2003 or thereabouts, my intention to write a novel based on my strange experiences in France as a teenager was featured in *Writers' News*,' writes subscriber Maggie Cobbett.

'In August 2015, when the ink was barely dry on the pages, I was finally able to see it on display in the book shop of the Writers' Summer School in Swanwick.'

'Why did *Shadows of the Past* take so long to write and self-publish? Set over three time periods in a French village, the 1960s part reflects the bizarre setting for the international work camp to which I went as a naïve schoolgirl hoping to improve her French. Some of the characters, including the criminal element, are based on real people and many of the events described are more or less as they really happened.'

The framed photograph on the front cover shows me – aged seventeen – standing with my new boyfriend Jean-Claude outside the entrance to the tunnel that had been kitted out as sleeping accommodation. With my poor grasp of the language, I struggled to understand much of what was going on in and around the camp, surrounding forest and nearby village, but the memory of it never left me. That was why, many years later and with a degree in French behind me, I contacted Jean-Claude again and set off with him on a journey of discovery.

'My original plan had been to stick to the 1960s, but I learned so much from my second visit and the older people he introduced me to that I decided to take my fictitious village back to the darkest days of



WW2 and the German occupation. Around the same time, I visited the Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris and was allowed to read letters written by children in hiding, which gave me several more strands to the story. To knit the whole narrative together, I introduced a new character who would blunder into the village in the 1980s and begin to uncover its many secrets. So the finished product combines elements of historical fiction, murder mystery and romance.'

**Website:** [www.maggiecobbett.co.uk](http://www.maggiecobbett.co.uk)

## Festival dad!



'Writing my first book sort of happened by accident,' writes subscriber Rick Leach.

'After years of prevaricating, I finally plucked up the courage to go to the Glastonbury Festival for the first time at the ripe old age of 48 in June 2010.'

'I didn't go by myself because I had my then sixteen-year-old daughter and her best friend in tow. I didn't really know what to expect. It had all the right ingredients to end up as a big mistake, yet it was one of the best experiences of my life. So good that I felt that I had to make a few notes afterwards about the whole thing, just a record of what happened, and

that years hence, she'd be able to say that we'd all done something extraordinary.'

'Those notes grew and grew. What I intended to be ten pages or so of a small diary ended up as nearly 50,000 words and my first self-published book through Amazon Kindle, *Turn Left at the Womble*. I certainly wouldn't have thought of doing anything with it if it hadn't been for the self-publishing route.'

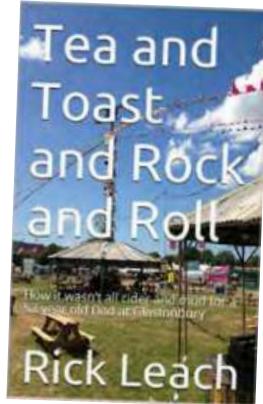
'It seemed to strike a chord with a significantly large demographic of older people with children who go to Glastonbury as well as the usual festival crowd. This surprisingly large and positive response to our light-hearted tale led to demands for a follow-up, which happened after 2011 and *Left Again at the Womble*.

'It didn't stop there and hundreds of sales of the first two, resulted in *Tea & Toast and Rock & Roll* which I again self-published in 2014.'

'I interspersed these with a non-fiction book about music, *Totally Shuffled*. I'm currently working on my first novel and due to readers' requests, a very, very final Glastonbury book about 2015.'

'Fitting all this around a full-time job is difficult but I wouldn't have it any other way. I now love to write and it was all by chance.'

**Website:** <http://turnleftatthewomble2.blogspot.co.uk/>



## A Scilly setting

'If ever you have the possibility to promote your book where it's set, go for it,' says subscriber Karin Bachmann from Switzerland.

'I did just that in the Isles of Scilly, the site of my latest middle grade whodunit *The Venetian Pearls*.

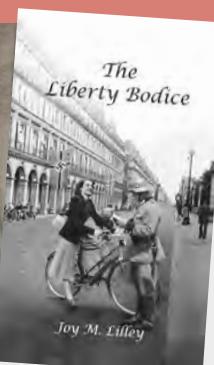
'Earlier this year, when I knew I would be spending my holidays in the Scillies, I asked the library in St Mary's whether they'd be interested in organising a reading. The librarian, Linda Thomas, did much more than that. She organised a reading for children, a workshop with their U3A writing group, and a talk in the Book Show on Radio Scilly. The reading for children had been organised ad hoc, when Linda realised two mothers showed interest on behalf of their children. Eventually, seven girls and boys showed up. Quite a good turnout for an out-of-school literary event. And the evening workshop attracted nine writers.'

'People could buy *The Venetian Pearls* and have it signed that day and throughout the week from St Mary's Library. The radio Book Show was definitely a highlight of my stay. Linda moderated the show, two local ladies discussed book reviews, and together they asked me questions. The hour just flew by.'

'Linda advised me about who might be interested in stocking the book, now also available from Mumford's stationary and book shop in Hugh Town, St Mary's. And what's my advice for writers who consider doing a similar event? Do it! It was a great experience and pleasure to meet readers, locals from the place the book is set in, and such a supportive and wonderful librarian.'



## Secrets and lives



'I first began to write seriously after retiring from a long nursing career back in 2008,' writes subscriber Joy M. Lilley.

'My first attempt was to write a short story for *The Lady* magazine. They had previously published a couple of my letters. The remit was to write a Mills and Boon-flavoured love story in the setting of a National Trust site. I chose Sissinghurst Castle as the location and busily set about crafting the love interest. On completion I proudly sent the work off to the magazine headquarters and was sorely disappointed to learn some months later that I had been unsuccessful.'

'Not to be deterred I decided to send the work to a publisher in London. They said yes it's good; now please send us the full manuscript. Panicking, I let them know it was a short story, but that I could expand the work and would send it in on completion. It became my first novel *Figs, Vines and Roses*. The publisher wanted several thousands of pounds and for me to sign the apposite contract found alongside the letter of acceptance. I could ill afford the proposal and found another, reasonable vanity press publisher and the book was released in January 2013.'

'The next venture was a plethora of short stories, just one of which was published. Entitled *Lost and Found*, it went into a book along with many other writers' short stories.'

'Following this, my second novel *The Liberty Bodice* began to take shape, after a visit to Market Harborough where the liberty bodice was made. Touring the factory museum, my mind wandered back to childhood when my sister and I were made to wear the rubber-buttoned garment along with a vest.'

'I have always been interested in WW2 and the story turns to the famous SOE [Special Operations Executive] agents, when our heroine joins the force that became known as Churchill's Secret Army.'

'It is a story to inspire all adult readers that tells of great courage in the face of adversity.'

'It's published by Wolf Paw Publications through the traditional route. It can be found on all Amazon and Smashword sites.'



# CIRCLES' ROUNDUP

If your writing group would like to feature here, whether you need new members, have an event to publicise or to suggest tips for other groups, email Tina Jackson, [tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk](mailto:tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk)



## SPOTLIGHT ON...



### Thames Valley Writers' Circle

'Thames Valley Writers' Circle was formed in 1993 when members of a creative writing course wished to stay together to improve their writing,' writes founder Barbara Smith.

'Three of its original group are still members, including me, who after many years as its convenor is now the Circles' life president.'

'Success came quickly with its first anthology winning the David St John Thomas Charitable Trust Award in 1994. This success was repeated in 2011, going one better by also winning the Winner of Winners Trophy open to all self-published books – the first time that it had been won by an anthology. In between, the Circle has produced many other anthologies as well as a pantomime and a 'soap opera' with each episode written by a different member. They have also swapped short stories with other writers' groups, exchanging critiques.'

'They have had many guest speakers, including some top writers, such as Colin Dexter, Richard Harris and Mike Walker, the acclaimed radio dramatist.'

'The Circle also runs its own internal competitions. Some are judged by members with one having online entries, which not only ensures anonymity but also allows overseas members to take a full part including the judging. Other competitions have external judges who are specialists in their field. This includes an annual one-act-play competition. The benefit for members is that they receive individual critiques of their work.'

'The Circle also celebrates National Short Story Week. Short stories by members are read by a local theatre group and recorded by the local hospital radio. These then form a series of "stories at bedtime" for patients in the Royal Berkshire Hospital.'

'The Circle members come from along the Thames Valley from Abingdon to Maidenhead with overseas members in France, Hungary, Turkey and Australia. Over the years many have achieved success with their writing, some as novelists and others as contributors to magazines. Others are still trying, while some write purely for fun. The Circle also maintains a relationship with Gosnells Writers Circle in West Australia. It meets every Tuesday with breaks for Easter, August and Christmas.'

**Website:** [www.thamesvalleywriterscircle.org](http://www.thamesvalleywriterscircle.org)

### *Mutual support for writers in their prime*

'Prime Writers is a recently established group of authors, all of whom have had their first novels traditionally published after reaching the age of forty,' writes Fleur Smethwick.

'Forty, as we over-forties know, is nothing; a mere click of the fingers in the chronology of our lives. So why do we even need Prime Writers? Well for one thing, the group developed organically, through people connecting on the internet, sharing information and cheering each other on. It developed because we are as much interested in each other as we are in ourselves.'

'We don't workshop or critique each other's work because we have professional editors now, but we do support each other. And we ask each other questions we are too embarrassed to put to our editor, agent or publicist. We cover most genres and write for children as well as adults.'

'We Prime Writers are a diverse group who have toiled for years, stealing hours whilst running businesses, holding down jobs and raising families. In a world exploding with young talent, we come encumbered with children, spouses, aged-parents, exes, pets, health scares and mortgages; pretty much every challenge and prior commitment you can think of; a filing cabinet of first-hand experience.'

'I doubt many aspiring writers have turned forty (or fifty!) and given up. The desire to write and get published is too overwhelming to be put off by such a trivial concern. Of course the dream is as powerful and the disappointments as crushing for a 23-year-old but there is something especially wonderful about getting published late in life and realising that it's still well worth daydreaming about the future.'

'We are keen to work with the media, event organisers and the book trade. Please visit our website to find out more, and join in the conversation on social media.'

**Website:** [www.theprimewriters.com](http://www.theprimewriters.com)



### Ninevoices winner

'You will be interested to know that the winner of our Ninevoices Short Story Competition, Sara Kellow, learned about this competition from *Writing Magazine* and is one of your regular subscribers,' writes Maggie Davies.

'Her story, *Laptops and Coffin Lids*, can be read on our website: <http://ninevoices.wordpress.com>

'Her story was previously shortlisted in one of WM's competitions, which gave her the encouragement to dust it off, revise it and send it to us.'

'With well over a hundred entries – from as far afield as New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Qatar and the United States – we are delighted to have raised £500 for the charity PMRGCAuk, which supports sufferers from polymyalgia rheumatica and giant cell arteritis.'

# Tell me a story

You don't have to go far, or plumb the depths of your imagination, to find great stories. Your writers' group is full of them, literally, suggests **Julie Phillips**

**S**tories are all around us. They are a big part of what makes us human and we all have our own personal life stories. Next time your writing group has a meeting take a look around at the people there. Some of them you will know well, others not so well, but what you will notice is that they are all different with diverse life stories to tell.

The purpose of this workshop is to allow your group to get to know each other better, but to also see how good storytelling works and its relationship to good writing. A word of warning, however: some members may have some life stories that might not be appropriate in this arena. You are a writing group undertaking a writing workshop, not a therapy session. In order to address this it might be a good idea to issue guidelines to members well before the workshop date. If necessary members participating could write a short description of the theme of their story which the chairman or designated member could look at before the workshop. There could also be a time limit imposed for each story so you don't run over time.

Stories come in all shapes and sizes and on all manner of different themes but for all stories it's not only the choice of words and phrasing that are important, but how they are spoken or interpreted by the reader. In order to give stories lift and for them to resonate with the audience it's important for writers to know how to speak the words they have written. This is how the story comes alive from the page.

For this workshop to work effectively and to give members time to prepare their stories the workshop could be announced a couple of

meetings before so that the stories have been thought of and practised and the designated person vetting them has had a chance to look at the story descriptions.

Stories can be happy or sad, exciting or thrilling or frightening and anything in between. It would be great if there was as wide a selection of different emotions in the stories as possible. Emotion is what draws the reader into the story and keeps them there. It's what readers relate to.

To begin with ask members to discuss what makes a good story and the elements a good story might have. Then whoever is running the workshop can give a little history of storytelling and why it is engrained in all our experiences from childhood to now.

Ask members to talk about their favourite childhood stories. What do the stories have in common? Why do they appeal to children?

Sometimes, with all the pressures that adult life brings, it's easy to forget about stories and the healing, life affirming properties they can have. Bringing stories to the forefront like this can be a welcome reminder that stories exist and as adults we need to relearn how tell them and listen to them. Then discuss what stories members enjoy as adults and why. Perhaps some members could bring in some favourite excerpts from their most-loved children's or adult's stories to read out to the group to discuss why they work so well.

Members can now take turns to tell their stories. Those listening can note down any observations they make about the story teller and the story being told; tone of voice, gestures, accents, physical movements, eye contact, and language used, etc.

When all the stories have been told the group can then report back their observations,

“ ”

*Sometimes, with all the pressures that adult life brings, it's easy to forget about stories and the healing, life affirming properties they can have.*

looking at what worked well with the story telling and what could be improved. Bringing this back to writing – you are a writing group after all – ask the group to think about and then discuss how telling their stories, listening to others' stories and making observations will help their own writing practice. Hopefully, the workshop will help to reinforce the fact that storytelling (orally not written) and listening to stories are

different from reading them, as the listener gets a different experience when listening rather than reading. It should also help members to see that thinking about the experience the reader has when reading, before they start writing and reading their work out aloud or recording it and then playing it back to themselves, will help them to hear the rhythm of their words and how it can be improved.

This workshop has scope for offshoots if the group discusses if they have plans to re-write their stories in light of what they have learned. And, perhaps, a few of them can read them out at a subsequent meeting to hear the difference the experience of the workshop made. **WA**

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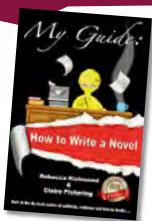
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Our workshops will offer you a fantastic insight into the world of writing, with detailed panels on a range of hot topics in books and publishing and in-depth sessions with our wonderful Guests of Honour. Add a smattering of tinsel and plenty of seasonal silliness and you might just have the ideal Christmas present for any genre fan...

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- Adam Roberts, acclaimed SF author of *Bete*, *Yellow Blue Tibia* and *Black Glass*
- Robert Shearman, award-winning short story author, scriptwriter and playwright
- Charles Stross, multiple Hugo and Locus award winning SF, fantasy and horror author

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[mslexia.co.uk/submit](http://mslexia.co.uk/submit) ◇ 0191 204 8860

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### The Writing Retreat

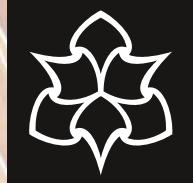
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# Heaven scent

*By Kathryn Goddard*



**Kathryn Goddard**, from Sandhurst in Berkshire, is an administrator in the NHS who enjoys writing short stories. She has had two 100-word stories published on the *Reader's Digest* website.

I never believed in angels. Ma used to say that if you found a white feather it meant your guardian angel was nearby. Well, huddled in this doorway, hiding from the bustle of the city, there are plenty of feathers; not pure and white but dusty municipal pigeon feathers. No angels here. Plenty of devils, but I have learned to recognise and avoid the worst of them.

'Are you all right, my dear?'

I want to lean into the doorway until I am absorbed into the peeling paint and splintered woodwork of the door until I am invisible, but I force myself to stand straight, with shoulders back and a confident tilt to my chin. Looking the stranger in the eye I say loftily,

'I'm fine.'

A woman, elderly, elegant and concerned, shrugs her shoulders and strides away, intent on her business of the day. I imagine she has forgotten me instantly. Suits me. I find myself staring after her though. Her expensive perfume lingers heavily in the air, a strong competitor for the usual city scents; diesel fumes, fast food, stale sweat and desperation. She is everything I am not. She is dressed in cashmere and silk, I am in ripped denim and frayed cotton.

I stoop to pick up my belongings. I am stiff and sore. The nights are getting colder now, and longer too. I hadn't considered that when I ran.

Leaving home two months ago it all seemed so simple. I couldn't stay where I was and the city called to me, offering me salvation. It didn't take long for me to recognise its false promise. I was not naïve.

I did not expect roads paved with gold, but nor did I expect the concrete to be quite so cold and unforgiving. It is better, though, than the alternative.

I thought back to the last time I saw Ma, shrivelled and discoloured. Life had slowly trickled from her, leaving her a desiccated husk, but still her eyes held mine firmly.

'Remember, whatever you do, I will always be proud of you,' she whispered. 'All I want is for you to be happy. Promise me.'

What could I do? I knew I would never be happy again, but I promised anyway. Wouldn't you?

Returning to the small terraced house afterwards, it was just me and him. My step-father. We did not get on. He had treated Ma with casual neglect and a drunken fist. When Ma was alive she acted as a buffer between us, too cowed to fight for herself, but always protecting me. All too soon after her death I caught him looking at me with disturbing, predatory speculation. I knew my time there was limited. I owed it to Ma to keep myself safe from him.

I was out of there one night while he was at the pub, drinking his way into a mood I knew would be dangerous. I caught the last train out and never looked back. I try not to think about him but he has a way of creeping into the fringes of my dreams, chilling even the warmer nights.

I shrug off the memory of him as forcefully as I shrug on my rucksack and head for the public toilets in the train station to wash and tidy myself. Whatever the day brings I will face it looking clean and tidy. No one is in the toilets yet and I risk whipping off my sweater and T-shirt so

I can wash properly rather than trying to do one arm at a time beneath clothing.

I use the deodorant sparingly. It is nearly finished and I don't know when I will be able to replace it. I keep my hair tucked under my hat so it isn't so obvious that it hasn't been washed.

I try to avoid the mirror but keep catching glances of a small, thin, plain girl with sallow skin who hasn't eaten for two days and is surviving on water from taps marked 'unsuitable for drinking'. I see two women enter the toilets and studiously avoid me. I know I am clean and tidy, as I used the last of my money to wash all I owned at the launderette, but I must give off an air of desperation. Maybe they think I'm going to mug them. I slide past them and re-enter the world.

I am getting more and more fearful of the future. The little money I had has trickled slowly away and although I try to eat as little as possible, I still can't get used to the constant hunger. I have no idea what to do now. I have sold my watch, my gold necklace and even a denim jacket for pennies. I will never sell Ma's wedding ring, the one from when she was married to my real dad, not the other one. I am too scared to wear it in case someone tries to steal it so it hangs round my neck, under my shirt on a piece of string. At night I stay away from the men who hide in public spaces, hunting. When

I first arrived, the moment I stepped off the train I was approached and offered protection but I refused to pay their price. I knew their game. They would pretend to look after me, get me to depend on them, then force me to pay my way. As I said, I'm not naïve.

The wind is bitter today, cold gusts catching me unaware and whipping my breath away. I duck in and out of shops with a sense of guilt as I know I have no money to spend. I never stay long enough to arouse suspicion. I avoid the cafés in department stores as the tantalising smells, tempting shoppers to drop in and linger over a meal, or cake and coffee, are too cruel. I enter a bookshop as though blown in by a determined breeze. There are a couple of easy chairs there, designed to allow people to sit in comfort as they leaf through potential purchases. I finger the spines of the books in the crime section, picking one at random before sinking into the welcoming hug of a vacant chair. I leaf through the pages, dully aware of the young girl on the till, all peroxide hair and thick, bright makeup, watching me all the time she is not serving.

The cushions are so comfortable and the shop so warm that I feel an overwhelming desire to sleep. I can feel it taking longer to open my eyes after each blink and my head feels heavy. I have a sudden delightful thought that if I fall asleep I might never wake up, but will find Ma waiting for me, ready to whisk me away somewhere better than this. A toddler, all round eyes and gummy smile, wanders too close for his mother's comfort and is promptly called away. I am one of those undesirables who litter the city, and I am too close, forcing them to see the reality of we homeless folk.

'Come on, miss, time to move on.'

Not the girl from the till, but a large, uniformed security guard, who she has called over to carry out the task of ridding the shop of my presence. There is pity but no compromise in his dark eyes as he escorts me to the door and stands watchfully to make sure I leave the property. My shame burns so strong that for a few moments I do not feel the bitter cold.

It soon seeps through my clothing, which is inadequate for this weather. I

wish I had brought my big, long puffa jacket but it had seemed too bulky when I ran and the weather was still kind.

I have reached my limit and have few options to consider. As I refuse to sell Ma's ring, all I can sell is myself. I have done myself no favours – I am too clean to beg. Waves of dizziness wash over me, but I comfort myself with the thought that I can survive for days without food, so long as I have water. My body is traitorous though, demanding fuel. My energy seeps away with the last of the shop's warmth and I begin to stagger, lurching from one lamp-post to the next, studiously ignored by those scurrying past who must think me drunk. I feel myself begin to lose consciousness, soft curtains falling across my mind, when that familiar heavy perfume snaps me out of it. I still lean heavily against my support but the wooziness fades.

'You can't possibly pretend to be fine now, can you?' the gentle voice prompts.

I shake my head. I am beyond denial.

Her arm, surprisingly strong, snakes around my back and supports me as she questions where I have been sleeping and when I last ate. I try to struggle from her, worried that I might smear city dirt onto her expensive top, but she pulls me closer and I have no fight left.

'Come on, let me get you some food.'

She takes me to a café, far more upmarket than the usual fast food joints, and spoons soup into me, crumbling a roll into it.

'Why?' I blur. 'Why are you doing this?'

She pauses, looks down, avoiding eye contact for a moment, then reaches across the table and squeezes my hand.

'I've been there, where you are now,' she forces out. 'A stranger helped me. She lifted me out of it. She was truly heaven sent and I thank my lucky stars for her every day. I promised myself I would do the same one day. Will you let me do the same for you? Please?'

I stare at her, looking for the catch, but seeing concern in her gentle eyes and the feeling the warmth of her hand a thought strikes me. Who says that angels need white feather wings? Some instead turn up wearing expensive perfume and cashmere. **WA**

## JUDGING COMMENTS

A short story needs to be about people and the ways in which they relate together, and it is difficult to do this effectively without touching on the human condition.

This applies to Kathryn Goddard's winning story *Heaven Scent?* because the story heroine is a young lady living on the streets and society has its attitudes to such people. These are shown very clearly in the story: other ladies in the cloakroom steer clear of our heroine; the young lady in the bookshop keeps her child well away from her.

Our heroine is clean enough, she takes good care of that. But she belongs to a recognisable class: street people. And many people want nothing to do with them. Perhaps it's because they think that street people might be drunk, or on drugs, or they could turn violent. But it goes deeper than that; it is part of the 'them and us' human condition.

All of this is told effectively because the storyline is so simple and uncluttered. It is also well structured. The opening sets the scene and introduces the main players. The setting is out there on the streets; the main characters are our heroine (who has run away from home for fear of sexual molestation from her step-father) and her rescuer (who provides the solution to the main problem in the story).

From that point, a little backstory is needed; we need to know why our heroine is on the streets. The reason why is shown briefly and effectively without any need of lurid, sexual, references. Such references seldom are necessary.

Then we come to the central narrative, the place where so many stories fail, during which Kathryn Goddard shows the reality of life on the streets – and of society's attitudes to people in this predicament. This is the main part of the story, and is powerfully told.

The ending, the heroine's rescue, is again delivered tightly and effectively. Helen Goddard does all the important things right.

## RUNNER-UP AND SHORTLISTED

Runner-up in the Heaven Sent competition was **Sandy Fischer** from Ankara in Turkey and entries shortlisted to final judging stage were from: **Fred Canavan**, Isle of Wight; **Andrew Hutchcraft**, Peterborough; **Charles Knightley**, Lymington, Hampshire; **Moira Lees**, Turton, Bolton; **Karen Mulligan**, Dunnington, York; **Bernadette O'Dwyer**, Atherstone, Warwickshire; **Sim Smailes**, Braintree, Essex; **Martin Strike**, Newbury, Berkshire.



Facing the dreaded task  
of writing a synopsis  
of your novel?  
Tackle it with advice from  
author **Margaret James**

**S**ynopses – I don't know a single author who enjoys writing these. Or who owns up to it, anyway.

They might be the bane of your life but, if you're aiming for commercial publication, synopses are also your most important selling tools. This is because many literary agents and commercial publishers will read synopses before they even glance at any opening chapters or pages.

When you write a synopsis, try to do these three things:

- **Make it short** – between 250 and a maximum of 500 words. You might come across a few agents or publishers who ask for detailed novel outlines or chapter plans, which will necessarily be much longer. But a synopsis is not a chapter plan. A synopsis is a tightly-focused summary of a story.

- **Make it clear**. Write in the third person and the present tense, explaining whose story you are

telling, where it is set, when it is set, what the big question(s) is/are going to be, and how everything is resolved at the end.

- **Make it complete**. Provide the reader with an outline of the whole story. If you don't do this, you'll be writing a blurb.

You should aim to write your synopsis in a way that suggests the style, tone and content of your novel.

What do I mean by that?

Well, let's suppose you're writing a mainstream historical novel set in Tudor times and are hoping to attract fans of Philippa Gregory or Alison Weir. Perhaps you're telling the story of Catherine Howard, Henry VIII's unlucky fifth wife, from the point of view of her brother/sister/cousin/friend/lover/whoever.

You could write something like: *Title* is told mainly from the

point of view of X, Catherine's Y, who has known Catherine since childhood and also knows a secret that could cost Henry VIII's new queen her life...

But, unless you're really writing a knockabout Tudor comedy in the spirit of Carry on Henry, it wouldn't be a good plan to write:

Catherine Howard – what a girl! A feisty, sexy minx at the court of the tyrannical King Henry VIII, Catherine plays with fire, and it's only a matter of time before she gets burnt...

Or, even less appropriately: A maid more sinned

against than sinning, this most unfortunate of damsels lived to rue the day the ageing Henry VIII first gazed upon her face...

That's far too wordy and pretentious and suggests your writing will be wordy and pretentious, too.

# DON'T MENTION THE S WORD!

“ ”

*Many literary agents and commercial publishers will read synopses before they even glance at opening chapters.*

# Q&A

What if you're writing humorous guy lit?

You'll need to work out what kinds of comic novels guys – and, don't forget, lots of female readers too – are likely to buy. So perhaps have a look at novels by, for example, Matthew Quick and Andy Jones.

You might decide to go for a synopsis that starts with something like:

Zane Gidley, world-famous Formula 1 driver, feels he's going nowhere. Girlfriend Jane has left him and even his dog doesn't seem to like him any more. So when aspiring stand-up comedian Lou Trehane makes Zane the butt of one of her routines and it goes viral, he decides there'll be a price to pay...

But, unless you're absolutely certain your novel is totally brilliant and also hilariously funny, perhaps don't write:

What a gas! One for dedicated petrol-heads everywhere, this sexy, souped-up comedy romp will get your party started...

Or:

This is the deeply moving story of Formula 1 driver Zane Gidley, a man who cannot find any meaning in his outwardly successful life. One day, he comes across a woman who is desperate to succeed in what is basically a man's world. But, for some unknown reason, this woman seems to hate him....

The example above doesn't suggest comedy to me!

How else can you make your submission package sparkle? Agents and publishers know all about the if-you-liked-that-you'll-love-this

effect. But, depending on your point of view, you might feel it's presumptuous (my book is nowhere near as good as X by Y) or degrading (I am a much better writer than Z) to link your name with authors who are already writing bestsellers.

But suggesting who your own readers might be can help an agent or publisher enormously by pointing out there is already a market for your kind of story. So by all means say you hope your own novel will appeal to fans of JK Rowling, Rachel Abbott, David Nicholls, Marian Keyes or whoever else is a more or less permanent fixture in the bestseller charts.

You can also try the meets approach, which doesn't always need to suggest two other novels, but does need to point out there is already some consumer demand for the kind of story you are offering.

What about *Gone with the Wind* meets *Downton Abbey* for your upstairs-downstairs family saga set in wartime? Or *American Beauty* meets *The Casual Vacancy* for your contemporary novel about ordinary, apparently nice people behaving rather badly?

The director of the BBC drama *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*, based on Susanna Clarke's bestselling novel, pitched his project to the BBC as *Amadeus* meets *The Lord of the Rings*.

As a novelist, you are a salesperson, and selling is a skill.

You need to learn this skill, and getting to grips with the art of writing a great synopsis will help you on your way. **W**

**Q** How do I find a literary agent for my novel? I've tried everything – going to conferences, festivals, parties, writing to them, emailing them, ringing them up – but I get nowhere. Do you think I should just go for self-publishing?

**Matty, Norwich**

**A** I used to tell my creative writing students that if they wanted to get anywhere as commercially published novelists, they should definitely try to find literary agents.

But these days I'm telling some students not to waste their time.

Why?

It's because the paths to publication are so many and various now, because most independent publishers don't insist on authors being agented, and because I've come to the conclusion that although the traditional path to publication is still a valid one, going straight to CreateSpace, Smashwords or the like as a self-published novelist is equally valid.

Literary agents and commercial publishers keep a close watch on bookselling websites for self-published novels that do well, and are always keen to snap up authors who have already proved they can attract readers. They check out fan fiction websites, too.

But sometimes, even very successful self-published novelists prefer to continue to self-publish. They know they'll earn far more money that way: 100% of their net profits on ebooks and print books as opposed to the 25% and 10% (on average) offered by most commercial publishers. Also remember a literary agent will deduct a further 10%-15%, and probably VAT too, before passing on any royalties to the author.

Literary agents and commercial publishers sometimes score by selling foreign, dramatisation, large print and audio rights to third parties, something self-published novelists can find it hard to do. But again, if you have a hit, the buyers of subsidiary rights will come to you.

As for the quality of the finished product – take a look at *Gorgito's Ice Rink* by Elizabeth Ducie, the runner-up in this year's WM Self Publishing Awards. The book is beautifully produced in both ebook and paperback formats, and is a pleasure to read.

Nowadays, how you go to market is your call.

## Now try this

As you write your synopsis, imagine you are trying to interest a film producer in the rights to your story. You have five minutes in which to reveal whose story you're telling, your big question(s), and how your story ends.



# Don't trust a



Get in the Halloween spirit with a spooky subscriber's poem,  
explored by **Alison Chisholm**

**S**ome poems set out to horrify the reader from the start. Others produce a little tingle down the spine as they draw you into them. Sue Gerrard, of St Helens, Merseyside has achieved this with her poem that begins with a casual reference and plunges further and further into a nightmare scenario.

## THE WITCHES' TREE

They called it the Witches' Tree  
Which was good enough for me.  
For as a child people talked and  
Slyly smiled when they spoke  
About its mysterious power  
Which for me grew hour by hour.  
This gnarled monster which  
Overlooked the town, was weighed  
Down with twisted, tentacled  
branches  
Which I feared would unwind, find  
And lock me in a slimy cold  
embrace

And caress my childish face  
As it took me to its deep  
infernal world.

As I grew up the brave (not me)  
Would venture closer just to see  
The impish sprites and vapid spirits  
Lodging there without a care among  
The leafy boughs: but how the  
Brave would run and run when  
The wind swayed the tree and  
Set those hissing spirits free.

All through my so short life it  
Overshadowed the town and  
shadowed  
Our every move and thought,  
and though  
We fought, without a sound crept  
Closer to our hearts and took root  
Within our minds until I woke to find  
The town was hot and black ...  
My friends had turned their backs  
On me and shouted 'witch';  
Roughly they questioned me about  
Magic wells and spells and familiars

In my home who would roam  
Through narrow streets as I  
Hunted for new prey to meet  
My tally for the day.

So now here I look evil in the face  
As it gathers round me in the guise  
Of so called wise, one time friends  
Who joyously come to see my end  
Swinging from the Witches' Tree  
Which has now opened up  
Its mystery to me.

The title of the poem is direct and explicit, but still hovers under a question mark. Is this name for the tree something rooted in the mythology of the local children? Or is there really something sinister about it? Readers move into the poem with the question unanswered but there in the back of the mind. There's a hint of the answer before we reach any concrete information about it, though. The word *which* has been used three times

in the opening stanza, with its inevitable echo of *witch*.

The narrative of the poem is straightforward. From the first stanza of introduction, it takes the reader through the narrator's childhood reactions to a gruesomely fascinating tree, to an observation of its power, and then to its complete takeover and final overthrow of the character. This account follows a logical, planned route through the material – bearing the underlying message that the poet knows where she's going, and the reader is in safe hands, even if the narrator is not.

The description is full of surprises. We might expect the branches to be twisted, but we're given a new dimension when we see they are also *tentacled*. The same branches don't scratch but *caress* the character's face. The spirits in the second stanza are *vapid*, and instead of the clichéd wailing they are *hissing*. The third stanza shows how the tree *Overshadowed the town and shadowed...* and although those repeated words are used metaphorically, their literal meaning is implicit. The description of the town as *hot and black* intrigues, and is reminiscent of artists' interpretations of hell.

In the first half of the poem, we are unable to decide whether the narrator is an innocent or has some involvement in the strange events. Moving into the second half, we are shown evidence of the extent of that involvement. The narrator has changed from singular to plural, as the child joins forces with others, first indicated in *We fought*. But our character may not be the prime mover in the events described, having to hunt *for new prey to meet / My tally for the day*. We can guess that the narrator may, in fact, be speaking from beyond the grave, already being aware of having a *so short life*. This information is not told to us; we must infer it from the images we're shown – a certain recipe for effective communication of the message.

Those images are clothed in finely-selected vocabulary. The register of the poem is clear and straightforward. There's no nonsense, and somehow the matter-of-fact tone makes the horror in the poem more apparent. The juxtaposition of attractively naïve and scarily dark phrases is another element that adds to the sense of horror. There's a gentle, nursery rhyme quality about the twee little phrase *Lodging there*

*without a care among / The leafy boughs.* Or so it seems, until we put the words into context and realise that the subject of that image consists of impish sprites and vapid spirits. *Magic wells and spells and familiars* seem cosy until you reflect on the previous line: *Roughly they questioned me about ...*

Sue Gerrard has selected an interesting rhyme pattern for the poem. The rhyming appears random – sometimes concentrated within a single line, sometimes with a few lines between the rhymes, embedded mid-line or at its end... and this slightly chaotic approach highlights the sense of disquiet the poem engenders. There's an underlying chant with more than a hint of menace. Murmur aloud the first few words of stanza three and listen for it.

One of the questions we can ask of a poem is does it start and finish in the right place? There's a lovely balance here, with just enough information being included at the start of the poem to intrigue, and at its end to satisfy the reader without becoming tedious.

There are two aspects of the presentation of this poem that the poet might want to think about again. It has been set out in the traditional style, with capital letters placed at the start of every line. These are no longer seen as necessary, and most poets today use capitals just to start a new sentence. Using them gives the poem a formal appearance, and because they are no longer ubiquitous, they draw attention to themselves – holding up the piece a fraction and making it a more ponderous experience for the reader.

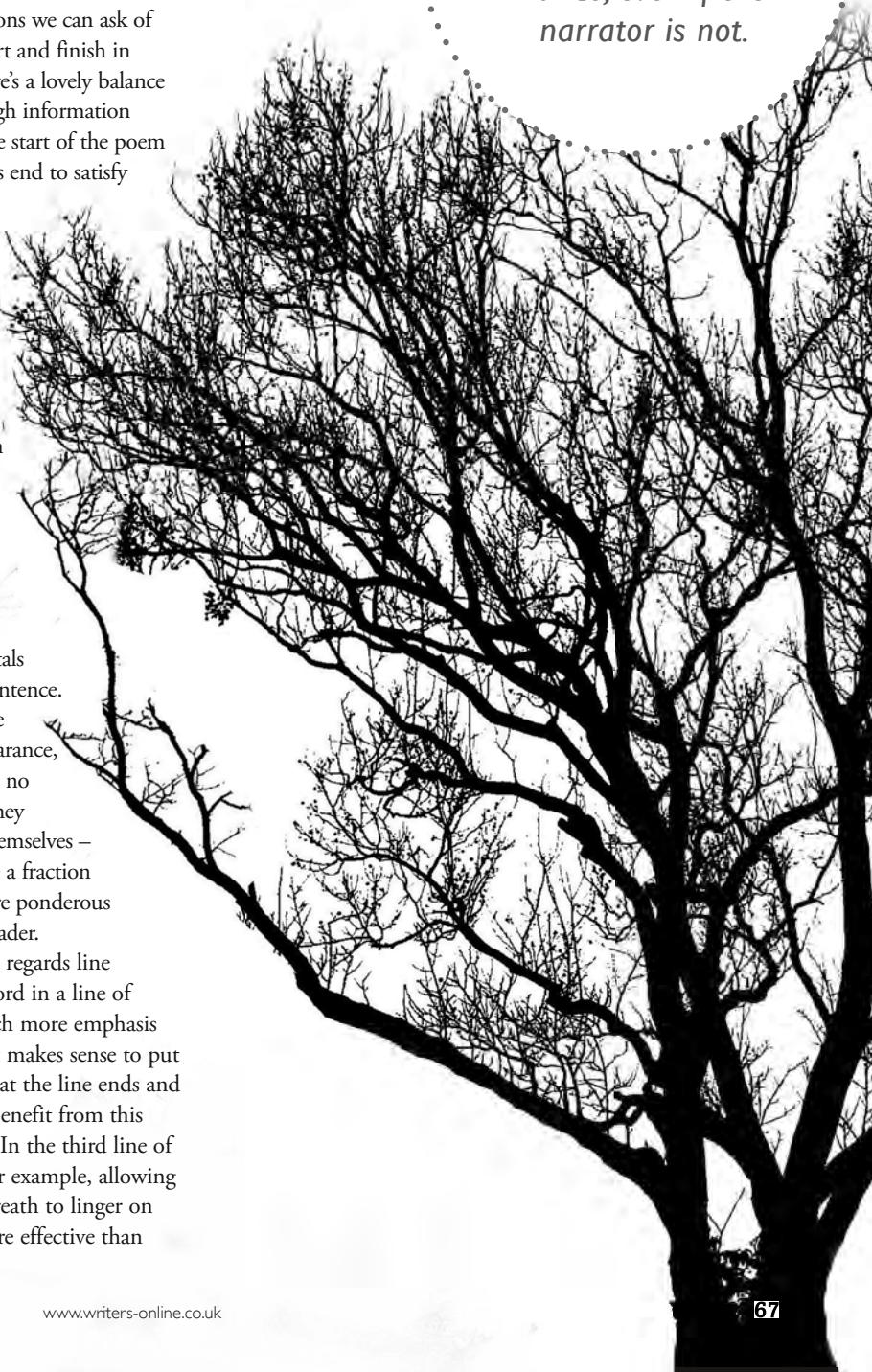
The second point regards line endings. The last word in a line of poetry carries a touch more emphasis than any other, so it makes sense to put the strongest words at the line ends and allow the poem to benefit from this subtle extra weight. In the third line of *The Witches' Tree*, for example, allowing the suspension of breath to linger on *talked* would be more effective than

stressing *and*.

These points could be addressed in a final revision exercise without marring the communication of the poem in any way – rather, they would enhance it. Whether or not Sue Gerrard chooses to make the adjustments, she still has a powerful and disturbing poem with which to haunt her readers. It will certainly make sure they no longer hesitate in the vicinity of malevolent woodland. **WM**

“ ”

*The poet knows where  
she's going, and the  
reader is in safe  
hands, even if the  
narrator is not.*



# Poetry from A to Z

Poet **Alison Chisholm** guides you through the language of poetry

**ELISION** is a merging of two sounds (vowels, consonants or complete syllables) so that they are slurred together. In the past it was often indicated by an apostrophe, but nowadays it tends not to be signposted, just observed and evident as a device for preserving the integrity of the metre, rhythm or vernacular. We see it with the apostrophe in archaic *ne'er* for *never* or *o'er* for *over*. Without the apostrophe, there's a good example in Roger McGough's beautifully observed short poem *The Leader*, which begins with an elision of *I want to* into *I wanna*.

Inspired by its popular Italian form, the sonnet was introduced to Britain at the start of the sixteenth century by Thomas Wyatt, and developed by his contemporary, the Earl of Surrey. The **ELIZABETHAN SONNET**, however, bears the alternative name of Shakespearean sonnet, as Shakespeare was arguably the best exponent of the form.

The poem consists of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter. The first twelve take the pattern of three quatrains featuring alternating rhymes, followed by a rhyming couplet:

**a b a b c d c d e f e f g g**

There is usually a turn (or volta) after the twelfth line, creating a reverse or punchline in the final couplet. Sometimes white space is left between the quatrains and before the couplet, but sonnets may be written as a solid block of text, with the option of indenting the last two lines.

## INCIDENT AT STRATFORD MARINA

*The gates grind heavy. Turn by weighted turn  
they face the force of water, moving slow  
to let a barge nose through. Dank moss and fern  
drip down the lock walls as the urgent flow  
recedes, becomes an eddy, trickle, still.  
And something stiller floats there, broken, crushed –  
white mound, white rope of neck, bright orange bill,  
and eyes no longer lustred. Harsh call hushed,  
she hangs in silence while her anxious mate  
swims to her side, and time and time again  
attempts to heave the flaccid neck up straight  
but fails, and drags and hauls his lifeless pen.  
She's past all movement. He, diminished, moans;  
strikes out across the basin; all alone.*

This example, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, shows a complete short poem written in end-stopped lines:

## THE EAGLE

*He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

**EXERCISE:** Find a poem that has a number of end-stopped lines, and read it aloud. See how your voice lingers where there is punctuation at the line end, and sense the extra emphasis there.

The last line demonstrates a slant rather than full rhyme, where moans is rhymed with alone. As in other set forms, occasional use of slant rhyme is permissible as long as the sound is very close to the original.

This form has one technical advantage over the Italian version. The Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet requires two sets of four lines that rhyme together. In the Elizabethan sonnet, only two lines ever have to rhyme together – much easier to achieve in the English language.

**EXERCISE:** Write an Elizabethan sonnet about a phenomenon of the natural world, including some fresh angle or insight in addition to any description.

**END-STOPPED** lines usually finish with a punctuation mark – comma, full stop, question mark and so on. Sometimes there is no punctuation, but the sense and meaning of the line's message are complete. End-stopping tends to slow the pace of the poem.

The **ENGLYN** is a Welsh poetic form – or rather, Celtic, as it also appears in Cornish and Breton poetry – which is used in eight variants. Englynion have strict and complex requirements of rhyme and syllable dynamics, using the cynghanedd (harmony), a combination of stresses, rhymes and alliteration. Although the nature of its pronunciation means that they sound best in the Welsh language, some writers relish the challenge of creating them in English.

**EXERCISE:** Try writing an englyn unodl union, a four line poem of 10, 6, 7 and 7 syllables in each line. The 6th, 7th, 8th or 9th syllable of the first line rhymes with the last syllable of the second, third and fourth lines. Line 2 ends with an unstressed syllable. In the final two lines, one ends with a stressed syllable, the other with an unstressed one. **W.M.**

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# Mermaid tales



Children's author Amy Sparkes splashes about with ideas for magical undersea stories

**S**tories about mermaids have enthralled us for centuries. Sailors returning on sea voyages told tales of mermaids, known for their enchanting singing voices and a rather unfortunate tendency to cause shipwrecks. In popular culture, mermaids still feature strongly in a wide variety of books and films.

Why not try writing about these intriguing and popular mythical creatures? Here are some ideas to help you write a mermaid book for children that makes a splash.

## Why mermaids?

Before you start writing, think about why mermaids appeal to children and how your book might relate to this.

There are many reasons why mermaids are popular. Along with fairies, wizards, monsters and other fantastical creatures, mermaids offer a wonderful opportunity to indulge a child's imagination. The underwater world of the mermaids has an added bonus – it's a location which most children cannot explore. For this very reason, it remains a most secret, most hidden place where the last traces of magic may still exist. However, mermaids have a great advantage: although they live in this deep and magical place, they can easily engage with our overwater world, by swimming up to the surface.

Children find it easy to relate to mermaid characters. Mermaids are

usually portrayed as friendly beings, and unlike creatures like dragons or goblins, they resemble humans and can be seen as a fantastical extension of the human child.

Mermaids offer adventure. Children often long for this; it increases their understanding of the world and their role within it. There is an anticipation of freedom in the underwater realm. It's often portrayed as a world with fewer boundaries and limitations than our own, increasing the opportunities for exploration.

How could your story meet – or perhaps challenge – some of these expectations and beliefs?

## Characters

Who will be the main characters in your story and what is special about them?

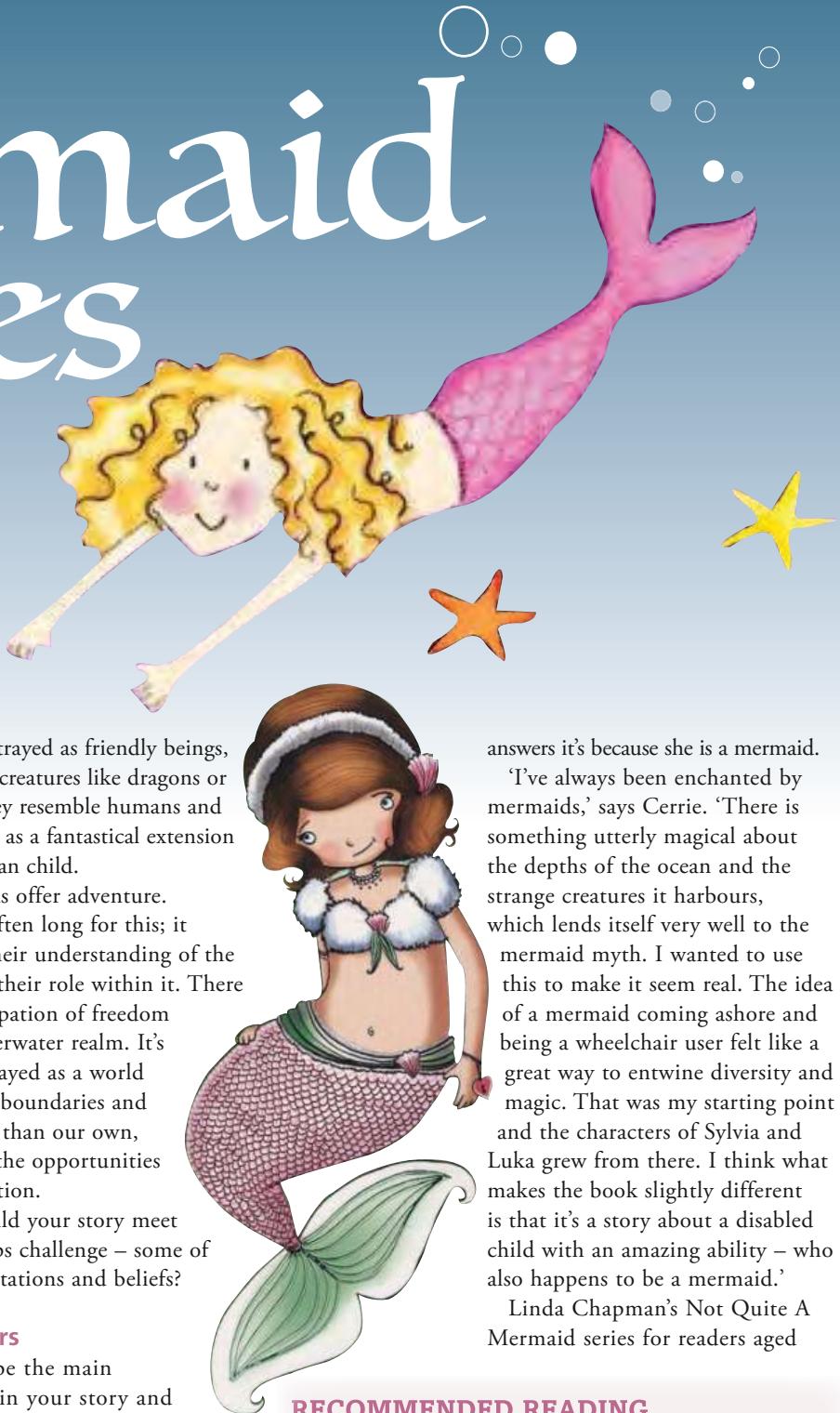
Traditional portrayals of mermaids – sitting on rocks singing, combing their hair – won't offer anything new. Create characters that make a reader sit up and take notice.

For example, Cerrie Burnell's picture book, *Mermaid*, tells the story of a boy, Luka, who sees a girl swimming beautifully in the water. She teaches him to swim and that night he dreams she's a mermaid and they have a wonderful underwater adventure. When Luka goes to school, Sylvia is there, in a wheelchair. The other children ask Sylvia why and Luka

answers it's because she is a mermaid.

'I've always been enchanted by mermaids,' says Cerrie. 'There is something utterly magical about the depths of the ocean and the strange creatures it harbours, which lends itself very well to the mermaid myth. I wanted to use this to make it seem real. The idea of a mermaid coming ashore and being a wheelchair user felt like a great way to entwine diversity and magic. That was my starting point and the characters of Sylvia and Luka grew from there. I think what makes the book slightly different is that it's a story about a disabled child with an amazing ability – who also happens to be a mermaid.'

Linda Chapman's *Not Quite A Mermaid* series for readers aged



## RECOMMENDED READING

- *Mermaid* by Cerrie Burnell and Laura Ellen Andersen (Scholastic, 2015)
- *Can You Catch A Mermaid?* by Jane Ray (Orchard Books, 2003)
- *The Singing Mermaid* by Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks (Macmillan, 2015)
- *Mermaid SOS* series by Gillian Shields (Bloomsbury)
- *Mermaid Legends: Estella and the Falling Star* by Coralie Sparkles (Matador, 2015)
- *Not Quite A Mermaid* series by Linda Chapman (Puffin)
- *The Secret Mermaid* series by Sue Mongredien (Usborne)
- *Emily Windsnap* series by Liz Kessler (Orion Children's Books)
- *Mermaid Curse* series by Louise Cooper (Puffin)

5+ also has an unusual take on her main character. Electra was born a human, but was found by the merpeople when she was a baby. They gave her seapowder so she could breathe underwater. As she doesn't have a tail, Electra is different from the other mermaids, hence Not Quite A Mermaid.

Linda explains: 'I decided I wanted to do something that was slightly different than other underwater stories and I found myself wondering what it would be like to be a human mermaid – a mermaid without a tail. A mermaid with legs would be unable to swim as fast as her friends but having legs might give her advantages in other ways. The story of Electra in Not Quite a Mermaid evolved from that thought and was great fun to write!'

Another interesting example is Liz Kessler's Emily Windsnap from her Emily Windsnap series. 'The kind of mermaid books I love are ones that go beyond the traditional ideas about mermaids and what they represent,' explains Liz. 'I think what makes Emily Windsnap different from many other mermaid books is that it's about a completely normal, fairly average school girl who just happens to become a mermaid when she goes in water. Emily is NOT your typical mermaid. She's adventurous, impulsive and often gets herself into trouble. She gets into scrapes with sea monsters and hammerhead sharks and disappearing castles. She stands up to Neptune in his court and tells him to change his laws. She is courageous and takes on pretty much any challenge she faces.'

This dual-life approach also offers another exciting element. 'Emily crosses boundaries between the two worlds she inhabits,' says Liz. 'I like the idea of bringing different worlds together. That's what Emily does. She links the worlds of the land and the sea, and in the Emily Windsnap books, I like treading this line of 'in between' and using it to highlight not only the conflicts between the two worlds but also the possibilities that come about when we try to bring the different worlds, and different communities, together.'

## Concept

An original concept is also important for an outstanding mermaid story. Children, particularly younger ones, enjoy reading books in the same series. A concept that lends itself to more than one book can help attract a potential publisher.

For example, in Gillian Shield's Mermaids SOS series, the mermaids (SOS – Sisters of the Sea) go on various missions to save the day, despite attempts by the evil Mantora to stop them. The action-packed and adventurous plots are appealing and by setting up this high-concept scenario, there are endless possibilities for future tales.

My Mermaid Legends series, under my mermaid pseudonym Coralie Sparkles explore the magical old legends that the mermaids tell their children. The first book, *Estella and the Falling Star* (published at the end of November) explains the arrival of the starfish, but the story is told through the eyes of an adventurous young mermaid. This concept of mermaid legends (similar to the idea of fairy tales in our world) sets up many options for the series.

Debbie Dadey's Mermaid Tales series is set at 'Trident Academy'. Using familiar settings, such as schools, can help engage readers. It's reassuring and intriguing to read about characters sharing similar experiences to the reader, even if these experiences take place miles under the sea! Debbie says: 'As a former teacher and librarian, my passion is writing for reluctant readers and mysterious creatures are a big draw for most kids; so mermaids are a win-win! For my newest series, Mermaid Tales, I spent quite a bit of time creating a travel guide to Trident City, the world where my mermaids live. And because my mergirls are in third grade, they can have ordinary school problems coupled with underwater adventures.'

Can you think of a new angle to explore the world of the mermaids?

## Magical moments

Another fun aspect of mermaid stories is the magic which is usually woven throughout. The joy of

fantastical tales is that anything can happen and the rules of reality are just asking to be broken.

### • Setting

Mermaid stories will feature an underwater setting. There are wonderful opportunities to indulge your imagination here – if mermaids are living there, what other marvellous and magical things might there be? Mysterious creatures? Ancient, undisturbed magic? Could one of these inspire another underwater story or perhaps take your story off in an interesting direction?

As well as creating an enchanting underwater environment, some books (such as Cerrie Burnell's *Mermaid*, *Emily Windsnap* and *Mermaid Legends*) also find creative ways to expand the setting so that characters aren't always confined to the sea. This offers another refreshing and magical dimension to the story.

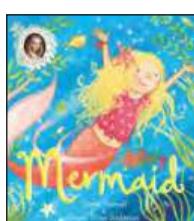
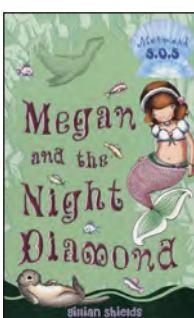
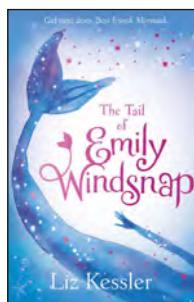
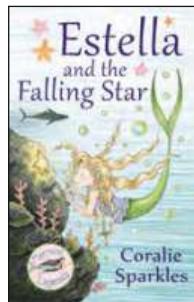
### • Magical elements

Inclusion or exploration of magical elements can enhance a fantastical story. Magic comes in many forms. Perhaps it's an energy which can somehow be summoned or utilised. If so, is magic actually the norm in the world you create or something more unusual which consequently influences the story? Perhaps a creature or item possesses magical powers, which affects the character that discovers it?

In *Estella and the Falling Star*, the stargazing mermaid finds a magical Wish Fish which grants her wish to visit the stars. And Sue Mongredien's Secret Mermaid series follows Molly, a human girl who discovers she can turn into a mermaid at night-time, with the help of a magic shell.

How could you weave magical elements into your story?

Children are waiting to read new and exciting mermaid stories. Take time to develop your characters, dream up an original concept and think about the magical world you create, and your story might be the one they choose. **VW**



# Matters of the flesh

How much sex and violence should feature in your crime novel?

Author and tutor **Claire McGowan** tests the limits



ex and violence. What do they have in common? Aside from possibly earning a film an 18 certificate, they are both topics you should handle with care in your novel. There are two main things to think about here. One is the possible reaction these topics will draw from the reader. The other is the impact they will have on your book. I'll deal with the former first, as I think it's actually less of an issue.

Many new writers worry about what they are 'allowed' to include in their book. Is anything taboo nowadays? Even in crime writing, which often features the goriest and most chilling murders? Amazingly, the most avid and bloodthirsty crime readers can still be upset by surprising things. Cruelty to animals, for example, often gets a big thumbs down. Killing off a dog or cat may inflame even the most mild-mannered bookworm. It's fine to kill off vast swathes of human characters by the most horrible methods, but leave that pooch alone.

Swearing can also be a surprising flashpoint, especially with American readers. One of the characters in my first novel, *The Fall*, is a young inner-city woman who swears like a trooper. I've had some comments about it, but I honestly believed that was the way she would speak, and so I left it in. I don't have as much swearing in other novels, as they are more plot-driven. It's an issue of voice – if you are confident your character would

curse, then I'd say leave it in. Just be aware that you may get some Amazon comments attacking your questionable vocabulary, and make sure you are very clear on why it's there.

## Sexual developments

What about violence, or abuse, or graphic sex? The success of the Fifty Shades series shows us that readers, and even readers who might outwardly seem conservative, do not baulk at quite extreme sexual content. And it's not just a recent development. I recently re-read Jilly Cooper's *Riders* and was amazed at how graphic the descriptions get (especially considering I read this when I was a fifteen-year-old at convent school). Does sex have a place in crime fiction? Personally I like a bit of romance in my crime novels. Think about it. Eyes meet over the eviscerated corpse... everything is heightened by danger, working long hours, and having a common mission in finding the killer... perfect romance territory, really. Not everyone would agree, of course, but I think there's a

**"It can be much more powerful to hint at things, and let the reader fill in the rest with their imagination."**

growing appetite among crime readers for stories about strong, liberated women with healthy sexualities. There is also much scope for writing about non-heterosexual relationships and we'll likely see more of this in future.

## Violent reaction

There is, however, a growing discontent with gratuitous scenes of violence against women in crime fiction.

Sometimes called 'torture porn', this can be not just disturbing, but wearying in its ubiquity. How do you know if the violence is gratuitous? It really comes down to tone and focus. If it's presented primarily for titillation and has no plot function, maybe you should reconsider. Of course, arguably all crime novels use violence for entertainment. But if the character is simply an agency-less, helpless, cardboard cut-out victim, waking up shackled in a basement and being subjected to horrible torture, this is not only offensive – it's boring. Avoid these worn-out clichés and find a new way to shock and unnerve. Also, bear in mind that the majority of crime readers are women.

Many people hate to read about cruelty towards children, or domestic abuse, or racism. This is something to think about if you're writing historical fiction. It may well be that attitudes were different in the past, but in order to keep the reader's sympathy, your main character might need to exhibit more modern and liberated tendencies. You can of course stay true to the time, but the reader needs to feel that the author does not agree with these views. Equally, you can write about modern-day characters who are nasty, racist, sexist, violent, and cruel, but you must draw a clear distinction between the character and the authorial voice. This is why it's so crucial to master viewpoint and narrative.

## *Let imaginations do the work*

You may notice that many crime novels end the scene at the point where the horrible violence (or the graphic sex) is about to take place. This is because it's usually much more effective to leave things to the imagination – writing ‘off the page’. Readers quickly become desensitised to shocking material, meaning the author has to resort to more and more extreme content to try to keep them engaged. This can often turn the novel into a dreary litany of who put what where and who sliced what off whom. Even the most extreme content will be blunted by overuse, so often less really is more. It can be much more powerful to hint at things, and let the reader fill in the rest with their imagination. They may well dream up something much more shocking than you had in mind, anyway.

## *What you know*

What about the issue of personal experience? Are you allowed to, say, write as a woman if you’re not one? Or as a person of a different age, race, or background? Are you allowed to imagine yourself into the mind of a victim of abuse or violence, if you have not encountered this? How soon after a terrible tragedy are you allowed to fictionalise the events of it, or write about something similar? My personal feeling is that, as a novelist, you have the right to write about anything and everything you want, whether this is your personal experience or not. That’s the beauty of fiction. Disturbing things happen in real life, so it’s no surprise if they are reflected in fiction. You must use your own judgement about what you think is acceptable to the public at any given point. I think it’s all down to how you write about it – is it sensationalised, or treated with sensitivity and care? – and also why. I’m sometimes told my work is harrowing in parts, but I reason that a lot of harrowing things happened in Northern Ireland over the years, and are still happening today. I feel somehow I need to show people what the reality was like. So, in my opinion, write what you wish. But I think you should be aware of the effect of what you choose to include – as with every aspect of your novel. Sex and violence are just some of your tools as a writer, so wield them with care. And

this brings me on to the next part. What happens to your novel when you write about these topics?

## *Maintain tension*

Well, usually what happens is the tension is cut. If the reader was turning the pages, desperate to see if the threat of The Bad Thing comes true, or if Jonny and Betty finally get it on once they’ve escaped the alien invasion, well, now they are going to be simultaneously pleased and disappointed. Because the tension of waiting for that moment is gone. Have you ever read a book that was beautifully written, but you just couldn’t get through it? You kept picking it up, admiring a sentence or two, then putting it down again? Or a book that you found dreadful or frustrating and even boring, that somehow had you staying awake till 3am? Usually this will be down to the author’s ability to keep things back. Information, resolution, backstory, that kiss we’ve been waiting 300 pages for, the murder we’ve been afraid of all the way through – they make us wait for it. In the same way that telling the reader all the backstory straight up will dissipate the suspense of the novel, allowing the threat/promise of violence or sex to come to fruition will cause a lull in the pace. If you’re clever you can interweave these moments and use them to give a breather, having other threads of suspense running through the novel to pull the reader back in.

The handling of sex and violence (and other non-PG activities) is really part of the general way you handle suspense in your novel. Unresolved sexual tension (UST) is always much more potent than that which is resolved. Think about sitcoms with will-they/won’t-they storylines. Did they work as well after the characters got together? I’ll bet the answer is no. Similarly, simmering violence is more page-turning than violence we’ve seen happen. And an unknown threat is always much scarier than a known one. It’s why I’m suspicious of books where you know the killer’s identity from the start, or see their viewpoint. I feel this inevitably cuts the tension. Ideally you don’t want to know which direction the danger will come from.

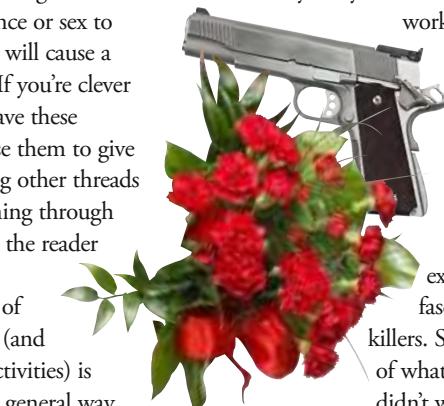
## *Turning senses into scenes*

How do you actually write sex and violence? There are dozens of books that deal with writing erotic scenes, and with action. Generally speaking, when writing any action scenes, avoid long chunks of described motions along the lines of ‘he did this, then she did this’. It’s very hard to read and quickly becomes wearing. Instead, abide by the good old rule of showing not telling. How does the character feel during this scene? What is going to be changed as a result of it? As well as what’s being done, what is being said and thought and felt? Many people believe that action scenes are inherently pacy, but if we aren’t clear exactly why the action is happening, they are actually pretty low-tension. Sex scenes also often slow the pace of the book, because once it’s happened, it doesn’t have much function as a plot point. So use sparingly, especially in crime fiction, and make sure the stakes are always high.

Finally, when writing about anything extreme, make sure you get the resolution right. Crime writers often shy away from the idea that their

work is primarily for entertainment. But the sad fact is – it’s true. As human beings we are fascinated by the bizarre and the horrifying. This explains our ongoing fascination with serial killers. So don’t be ashamed of what you write – if people didn’t want to read about

disturbing things, they wouldn’t buy so much crime and horror fiction or watch so many TV shows and films with dark content. The way that crime fiction often deals with this moral dilemma is to set up a universe with a very clear code. People may do bad things and hurt others, but they have to be punished for it. It’s why readers are often frustrated with ambiguous or unresolved endings in crime fiction. Ultimately, even if there’s been a trend to shades of grey (no pun intended) and flawed, unreliable heroes, we want to know who the real bad guys are, and we want to see them punished for it. So don’t deny your readers this very essential comfort. **W**



# CRIME FILE

**I** don't think I've ever regarded myself as a natural crime writer, which is why I struggle with the nuts and bolts of plotting the crime and investigation, but feel much more comfortable writing about relationships and family dynamics. I worried that this would show in *Close Your Eyes*. So says bestselling author Michael Robotham, whose latest novel featuring Joe O'Loughlin and Vincent Ruiz, *Close Your Eyes* (Sphere), is now available; a book guaranteed to rank as one of the crime novels of the year. 'So much of this story revolves around Joe O'Loughlin and Julianne, his estranged wife. Rather than being a sub-plot of a main story, it has equal billing, so it's like two novels have been woven together.'

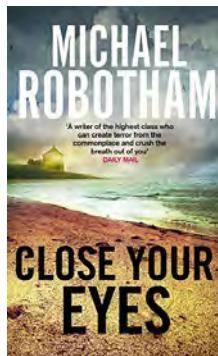
This interweaving of stories and subplots is what makes *Close Your Eyes* so compelling, along with the emotional dynamics that Michael has developed amongst his characters. 'Three words are pinned above my desk: Make Them Care! It helps that I'm a pretty emotional person and can make myself cry when

I'm writing and I embarrass my daughters by sniffing through films... even animated ones. Quite often the exchanges I've portrayed between Joe and his daughters mirror conversations I've held with my girls. I steal their best lines but they get to spend the money. It's a deal that works pretty well,' he laughed.

Having had *Life or Death* published as a standalone paperback this year, how was it coming back to Joe and Vincent? 'I have to admit it was hard because I loved writing *Life or Death*. In the past I've described it as the book I was "meant to write" and I think this is because it flowed so easily and I came so close to transferring the story that was in my head onto the page. This made it hard to go back to Joe and Vincent and, for a long while, I struggled. I'd written half a novel and realised I was basically regurgitating a previous one. Then I began again, focusing on Joe's family rather than the crime.'

Tough and grizzled as he undoubtedly is, Vincent Ruiz – O'Loughlin's best friend and pseudo-minder – is very often the calming conscience. Is he likely to

Serial characters' relationships move into the foreground in Michael Robotham's latest novel, he tells **Chris High**



take centre stage anytime soon? 'I'm always on the look-out for stories where Vincent Ruiz could take centre stage. Given that he's now in his mid- to-late sixties, his days as an action hero are probably numbered, but I am considering taking him back to his early days as a detective and writing about one of the cases that haunts him. Watch this space, as they say.'

What is it that binds Ruiz and Joe so closely together? 'They're both intelligent men who struggle to know if they are good fathers and husbands. I also go back to Joe O'Loughlin's description of Vincent in *Bleed For Me*: "Broad like a bear with a busted nose and booze-stained cheeks, Ruiz has had three marriages and three divorces. World weary and fatalistic, I sometimes think he's a walking, talking cliché – the heavy-drinking, womanising ex-detective – but he's more complicated than that. He once arrested me for murder. I once rescued him from himself. Friendships have flourished on less."

**Website:** [www.michaelrobotham.com](http://www.michaelrobotham.com)

## Excuse me officer

Not sure where to go next with your crime novel? Author and former Police Inspector **Clare Mackintosh** answers your questions on law, forensics, and procedure.

**Q** I'm struggling with making my police dialogue authentic. In TV dramas officers seem to refer to each other by their rank or surname, but I've read a couple of crime novels recently where first names are used. Which is correct?

*Georgia Cannon, Abergavenny*

**A** In my experience officers of the same rank call each other by their first names, and often use first names for officers of senior ranks too, if they know each other well. Otherwise it's usually just the rank: Sarge, or Boss, Ma'am, Sir or Guv for anything senior. If someone had walked up to me and said, 'ah, Inspector Mackintosh...' I'd have assumed I was in trouble.

**Q** I'm writing a police procedural about a missing girl. The girl is found dead and the police are interviewing a suspect. I want them to tell the suspect she's still alive, in order to provoke a confession; is that something they can/would do?

*John Chance, Bridport*

**A** You're writing fiction, so anything can happen, but you're right to question this. Lying to a suspect in those circumstances is likely to render any subsequent evidence inadmissible in court, so in reality the police would be unlikely to do it. However, they would definitely hold certain bits of evidence back, and if your police character is the sort who might sail a bit close to the wind, there's nothing to stop you from breaking the rules.

### Crime-writer's tip

'Working in prisons, I learnt that victims and perpetrators are not so very far apart. If you think about the factors that drive people to commit crime, you may be surprised. It's not always about "us" and "them", so ask yourself: what would cause you to cross the line?'

**Helen Cadbury, whose *Bones in the Nest* is published by Allison and Busby**





# WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SCARY MOVIE?

Horror writers can learn a lot from watching films. Author and publisher **Alex Davis** suggests some modern classics to unsettle down with this Halloween

It's not going to be any secret to regular readers of my articles that I am rather partial to horror fiction, and the same is very much true for horror film. Both media are undoubtedly trying to serve up the same effect – a sense of fear, of dread, to unsettle and unnerve the person engaging with it, be it reader or viewer. With that said, they are very different cultural forms, and while there is some crossover much of the time they are angling for a different kind of audience. So is there anything, good or bad, that an aspiring horror writer can learn from the range of horror films out there?

## THE BAD You can't deliver jumpscares in a book

If you watch a lot of modern

Hollywood horror, there's often a fair dependence on the 'jumpscare' moment, that instant the creature leaps out and the music bursts to life from out of nowhere. In a cinema, or even on the small screen, this can be effective – especially when delivered in small doses. The viewer is not expecting the visual and aural shock and experiences a short blast of adrenalin and probably spills their popcorn in the process. In a book, short of a pop-up volume, you're not able to deliver this same kind of effect. You have to use the power of your words to create the fear, and that depends far more on a different kind of scare, delivering strong psychology and atmosphere.

## THE GOOD Horror films will tell you a lot about current fears

Horror is a genre that has changed a lot over the years, and it's fair to say

that's because society is constantly changing and what we are afraid of is constantly changing. The events of 9/11 seemed to lead to a spate of films about home invasion, tapping into increased fears of loss of security, even on 'home ground'.

The news can be as useful a thing as anything to engage with as a horror writer for ideas. On top of that, watching international horror films will tell you more about the fears of that particular nation, and it's not hard to spot trends – Japanese horror very often features children prominently, for example.

Of course, what comes next is (as ever) hard to predict, but there seems to be a sort of bubbling under of body horror as I write this, which could be the next distinctive genre movement. Being aware of the trends can certainly help, but it's also

important that you're not a slave to them as a writer – remember, trends can come and go very quickly, in the space of months in some cases.

### THE BAD Make sure you develop your characters

Now, there are a number of horror films that do this very well – but ultimately these can be rather swamped with movies featuring cardboard cut-out protagonists and antagonists who are little more than mechanisms by which to deliver violence, gore and nudity. It can make the genre a very frustrating one to engage with at times, if I'm brutally honest. Horror film for some people is very much about this kind of visual effect – which is fair

enough, if that's what the audience wants then directors and producers will seek to give it to them. But in a horror book we don't have anywhere to hide – we can't simply bury the essentials of plot beneath layers of shock value. Novels depend on strong characterisation, clear goals and live or die on the reader caring about those involved in the story. Following the essentials of plot in horror writing is as vital as in any other field of fiction.

### THE GOOD Horror films tap into common human fears

Horror in all its forms tends to tap into things that are frightening to people on some fundamental level, and never is this truer than of horror film, which appeals to a wider audience than horror fiction. As a reviewer, and to be honest, before

that as a viewer, I've always been interested in what makes a horror film genuinely scary, and often it's a matter of digging beneath the surface. Yes, we may be confronted by a monster or a spirit, but what is it about that antagonist that makes us feel so uneasy? If you consider some of the 'classic' monsters, you could say that a werewolf is a totem of the animalistic side of our nature and that zombies represent a fear of becoming nameless, anonymous, conglomerated into a single mass without identity. And surely all ghost stories reflect in some way on the big question – just what happens after death? Horror film on a level can look simple, but there are often underlying factors that are far more subtle going on.



## RECOMMENDED VIEWING

**H**aving watched more horror films than I dare to count, I thought a great way to close this article would be to take a look at some of those that have been particularly interesting and useful to watch and genuinely made me think about my own writing, or inspired a raft of new ideas. They all use techniques, styles and storytelling that have been very helpful to my own work, and hopefully will do the same for you.

### 1 Ringu (1998, Japan, Hideo Nakata)

Japanese horror is something distinctly different to what the US and the UK does, and offers probably the finest examples of modern ghost stories out there. I heartily

recommend this despite a lot of sleepless nights and my continuing vow never to watch it again – for me, it's the perfect example of how a ghost story should be paced and delivered. It's also utterly terrifying – don't say I didn't warn you.

### 2 Session 9 (2001, USA, Brad Anderson)

Something of a cult favourite among horror fans, *Session 9* is a fantastic example of how to use setting within a story. The movie takes place in a genuine abandoned mental asylum, and the effect the location has on the protagonists is superbly captured. With lots of intrigue and mystery throughout, this is a not-to-be-missed piece of intelligent horror.

### 3 Saw series (2004-2010, USA, various directors)

Not everybody's cup of tea, but often unfairly written off as nothing more than movies about torture. The series spans a full length of seven films, and whilst there is a decline in quality towards the end, I recommend a start-to-end viewing for two reasons – firstly, there are some fantastic twists in the series. The finale of the first movie is pretty famous, but subsequent ones are also incredible. Secondly, I've never seen a horror series that has considered the plot so carefully. There are great elements of backstory coming out all the time, and even in the last two films things are

## THE BAD

### Don't lean too heavily on violence and gore

While many horror stories can feature aspects of violence or 'blood and guts' as it's become known for shorthand, in the written form it can often be a good idea to use this kind of thing carefully. It's almost like the old dilemma of writing a sex scene – first of all, what is the value of showing it all in detail? And secondly, how do you do so without it sounding hackneyed and cliched? There's a limited vocabulary for scenes containing violence, and sometimes reaching for elaborate synonyms, metaphor and simile can just make things sound totally overdone. In film,

it can be the case that 'more is more', but in novels and short stories 'less is more'. Readers' imaginations will fill in the blanks with scarier details – unique to them – than you could write on a universal level.

## THE GOOD

### Horror film will tell you everything you need to know about third person

It's almost invariably the case that we see the action in a horror film through a camera – this is even the case in 'found footage' movies, although the camera there is being held by a character in the movie. What horror film over the years has

“ “  
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of your words to create  
the fear, and that  
depends on a different  
kind of scare, delivering  
strong psychology  
and atmosphere.” ”

provided me with is a real education in the effective use of third person in producing fear – where are you seeing the action from as the 'omniscient' narrator? Where should we be seeing it from? Can we suggest movement or some sight just out of the character's view but seen by that omniscient narrator?

How does the character move and react to the situations unravelling around them? Watching and thinking carefully about camera angles and means of presentation in horror film can be hugely useful to any writer, as those are often tricks that you can employ with the written word. **W.M.**



still happening that make you think very differently about the events of previous instalments. If you have a horror series in mind this is required viewing.

#### 4 **Exhibit A** (2007, UK, Dom Rotheroe)

There are a lot of 'found footage' films out there, usually shot on 'handicams' at a low budget and of a hugely varying quality. Whilst *Skew* is another example of the genre worth watching, nothing for me has beaten *Exhibit A* in the subgenre. A simple story of a family's breakdown is horribly documented and caught for the viewer, with an impactful finale that will stay with you for days.

#### 5 **Red White and Blue** (2010, UK/USA, Simon Rumley)

I could easily have recommended any of Simon Rumley's work – *The Living and The Dead* is also fantastic – but this one is the best in my eyes. A compelling relationship story concerning two broken-down people which takes a dark and brutal turn, I've never seen a horror film deliver so much emotional punch – something often sorely missing for movies in the genre.

#### 6 **The Squad/El Paramo** (2011, Argentina/Colombia, Jaime Osorio Marquez)

An absolutely impeccable piece of

psychological horror which would have made a wonderful book in its own right, with very strong characterisation and claustrophobic settings. A wonderful example of less being more in the genre.

#### 7 **Flowers** (2015, USA, Phil Stevens)

One for the strong of stomach, but for all its brutality this is a film that is hugely artistic and plays out like a fractured, broken short story. Six victims of a serial killer come back to life within the crawlspaces of his house, and must face their own individual nightmares. Pure visual poetry of a macabre nature – but not for the faint of heart.



Ten essential pieces of software to make you more productive, suggested by **Chris Glithero**

In the 21st century there are many software tools that can assist writers in their eternal quest to write better, faster and longer. There are tools that can aid you in your research, tools that can help you to organise your writing life, tools that can simplify the writing process and tools that you can use to track your progress every minute of the way. Back in WM July 2015 I looked at ten essential online tools for writers, but in a digital world full of distraction, many writers feel the need to disconnect while they pour out their words.

Once you've disconnected your internet and shut away the hordes of cute cats, clickbait articles and hilarious memes however, you don't necessarily have to give up the powerful digital tools that will aid you in your work. Here I'm going to take a look at ten software tools that you can use in your writing life even as you shun the internet and all its glittering trappings. More than half of these are absolutely free, while those which have a price-tag listed also have the offer of a free trial, so you can try before you buy.

#### Zenwriter

For distraction-free writing  
(Free 15-day trial, £12 to buy)  
[www.beenokle.com/zenwriter.html](http://www.beenokle.com/zenwriter.html)

Zenwriter is perfect for anyone who finds themselves clicking away from their writing to check their emails or

to have a cheeky game of solitaire. Upon opening the software you'll have all such distractions hidden from you, with the entire screen instead being replaced by a soft background of your choice with accompanying background music (or not – once again your choice). Start typing and your text will appear on the screen, and you can even apply the sound of an old-fashioned typewriter to each key press. The perfect tool for any writer that gets easily distracted, or who just wants to create a peaceful environment for tapping away at the keys into the small hours.

#### FreeMind

For 'mind mapping' your story  
(FREE)

<http://freemind.sourceforge.net>

Some writers can just start scribbling or tapping away at the keys and produce a masterpiece, but many of us need or prefer to have some sort of plan in place first. Mind mapping – a visual method of organising information – can be an effective way for writers to collate all of their ideas and inspirations into a workable narrative structure or plan. FreeMind is a Java-based program which allows you to create different 'nodes' that spring from a central idea. Each node contains pieces of information and can themselves give birth to 'child nodes' – these might be details relating to your protagonist's appearance or character, they might be important plot points, thematic issues or anything else for that matter. Aside from helping you plan your story or project, FreeMind can also be useful for evolving your ideas and developing new ones in a visually accessible way.

#### Scrivener

For organising and writing your whole project [www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php](http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php) (free 30-day trial, £26 to buy)

Scrivener is part-word processor, part-organisational tool and part-editing aid. Its developers, Literature and Latte, appear to understand that much of the important parts of writing occur away from the actual pages that will show up in the finished manuscript, and so the program allows you to store and rearrange all of your character/setting notes, plot points, research and other auxiliary material under the banner of a single project. Much more than that though, Scrivener automates the process of formatting for things like novels, scripts and other document types, so you can concentrate on actually getting words on the page. Each chapter or scene can be written separately and then compiled by Scrivener at the end, making it easy to locate a specific part of your manuscript when editing. When it comes to compiling the finished document, the software can output in a range of forms and formats, including doc, depending on whether you're sending out a manuscript to agents, self-publishing an ebook or anything else.

#### Write it Now

For novel writing  
(£40, restricted demo available)  
[www.ravensheadservices.com](http://www.ravensheadservices.com)

Writing a novel can be a long and arduous process, and most novelists will take any help they can get along the way. Write it Now incorporates many of the same features of a standard word processor – spell-check,

word count, thesaurus etc – but it also features a host of tools designed with novelists in mind. Cliché checking, note taking, word targets and submission tracking are just a few of these, while the software also features dedicated storyboarding, storyline editing and idea generation tools.

### Final Draft 9

For writing your blockbuster screenplay (Free 30-day trial, £160) [www.finaledraft.com](http://www.finaledraft.com)

If you're a screenwriter you've probably already heard of the screenwriting software package Final Draft, and this is by far the most popular tool used by professional screenwriters and Hollywood studios alike. Scripts can be notoriously fiddly beasts to construct, with very specific parameters that must be followed. Final Draft automates virtually all of these tedious formatting tasks, helping the actual creative writing aspect of the process to flow. As well as containing more than 100 templates covering virtually every kind of script, the software also boasts a multitude of other features, such as intuitive scene navigation, text to speech script reading and character highlighting to name just a few. It is, in short, regarded as the standard by the movie industry, but at £150+ it is a little pricey if you're just getting started.

### Trelby

For scriptwriting on a budget (Free) [www.trelby.org](http://www.trelby.org)

If your budget doesn't stretch to Final Draft, fear not, there is a free and equally as functional alternative that you can use to easily format your scripts. While it may not have the same bells and whistles as its big name counterpart, Trelby fulfils the same function – to make it easier and less time-consuming for scriptwriters to create a professional-looking script. Easy to use straight after download, you can quickly change between scene descriptions and dialogue by using the tab key, and things like character names and scene locations can be entered with just a few key strokes.

### Microsoft OneNote

For storing and organising your notes (FREE) [www.onenote.com](http://www.onenote.com)

Unlike most Microsoft software

packages, OneNote is completely free. Not only that, it gives you pretty much everything you'd want from a note taking program: the ability to create different sections for different projects; separate tabs for each aspect or chapter, and of course the ability to write short or extensive notes as desired within these. You can also 'clip' a portion of the screen and paste it into your notebook – perfect for storing anything you need to read later when you're offline. Whether you're a novelist, a non-fiction writer or a journalist, you can use OneNote to store all your notes and research clippings conveniently and tidily. You can even sync your notebooks between different devices so that you can check up on your research while on the move.

### Write Sparks

For beating writer's block (Free for 'Lite' version, £33 for 'Gold') [www.writesparks.com](http://www.writesparks.com)

Sometimes the hardest thing for a writer can be just getting started. WriteSparks contains seven random generators (fifteen in the 'premium' version) to help you get the creative juices flowing, including the First Line Generator, What If Story Generator, Mixed Metaphors Generator and the Quick Prompts Generator. Once you've settled on a prompt, such as 'It was an unexpected visit,' or 'There was once a chance I didn't take,' you can begin writing your story in a blank box within the software. To give you a little added time pressure to get things moving, you can also set a customisable timer which will tick away your allotted writing time. The free version contains a good selection of prompts to get you started, while the Premium version of the software contains millions of prompts and ideas, as well adding poetry prompts and character profiles into the mix.

### Zim – A Desktop Wiki

For world building (FREE) [www.zim-wiki.org/index.html](http://www.zim-wiki.org/index.html)

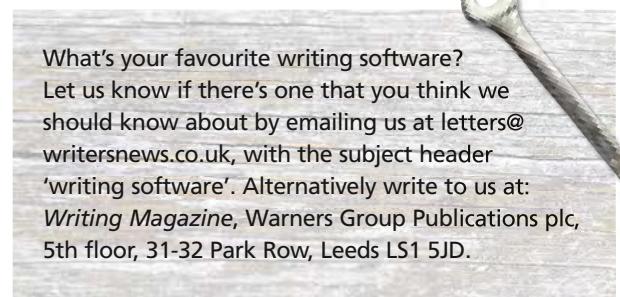
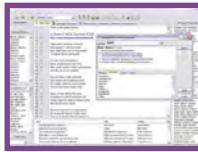
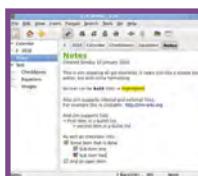
In the process of writing a novel or screenplay you may need to create an entire world of back story and background information for your own reference, particularly if you're writing a sci-fi or fantasy epic. In doing so it can be hard to keep track of what is what, who lives where and who did

what to who when. Zim – A Desktop Wiki is a surprisingly easy software tool for building and storing information relevant to the worlds that you create. Think of it like having your own personal Wikipedia-style encyclopaedia to the world of your story – one which you can refer to and add to whenever you want and without the need for an internet connection. As with Wikipedia, you can create many different pages and then connect them to each other using hyperlinks. It's an elegant and intuitive way of keeping track of the fiction you're creating, and virtually eliminates the need to have reams of scribbled papers strewn across your desk. For non-fiction writers too it can be a handy way of storing and accessing research, particularly during lengthy projects.

### Verse Perfect with McGill English Dictionary of Rhyme

For writing poetry and lyrics (FREE) [www.bryantmcgill.com/rhyming-dictionary](http://www.bryantmcgill.com/rhyming-dictionary)

For anyone writing rhyming verse, this free tool is a tremendously powerful and convenient solution. Simply start writing your poem in the main window of the software, and it helps with formatting and even creating the poem. You can click on any word that you wish to see rhyming words for. All available rhymes will appear at the side of the screen, while below this you can find alternative words with similar meanings. You can even double click on a word to replace it with one of these suggestions, saving considerable time flicking through conventional rhyming dictionaries and thesauri. Another handy feature is that the software displays the number of syllables present inline, making it much easier to edit your poetry at a glance. Particularly useful for beginners is the fact that you can select from eleven different popular verse forms, with the number of syllables and rhyme schemes required displayed alongside each line. **W.M**



# WRITERS' WEB WATCH

**A**uthonomy, the best-known online showcase for writers, closed its doors at the end of September, despite having been a launchpad for many novelists since its beginnings in 2008. One of the reasons given by its parent HarperCollins was that the community had become smaller.

But smaller doesn't mean non-existent, and although writers' showcases are nothing new, there are still many possibilities for writers who want to tap into an online community of readers, writers and critics. For writers of children's and YA fiction, the destination site is Wattpad ([www.wattpad.com](http://www.wattpad.com)). YouWriteOn ([www.youwriteon.com](http://www.youwriteon.com)) is still active, providing free feedback for its highest-rated authors from professionals at Random House and Orion. The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) offers its members the opportunity feature in its ALLi Showcase (<http://allianceindependentauthors.org>) But what else is out there?

It's likely, because you're reading *Writing Magazine*, that you might have written a short story. Good. We very much approve. Now what are you going to do with it? Get it out there! But, if you're a new writer, how do you know if it's any good? A way of testing the water might be new short story website Taylz (<http://taylz.com>), which in its Phase 1 period is inviting writers to submit stories as it's compiling a library of work by new voices in fiction. Phase 2 will launch the fiction to a reading public. Writers are asked to read and review other writers' stories, and for every review they complete, they receive a

review of their own work. Reviews are structured around a series of questions designed to provide useful feedback rather than simply the reviewer's opinion. Taylz is new, which means untried and untested, but also free, so not a high-stake investment. If it takes off, you'll have been in at the beginning, and perhaps received some useful pointers/confidence boosters about your work.

The lines can blur between online literary magazines and writing showcases, but when wasn't writing in the margins a good thing? Platform for Prose ([www.platformforprose.com](http://www.platformforprose.com)), which launched in April with a cool, lo-fi design, is an online showcase for contemporary short fiction, flash fiction and poetry. Proving the point that it can be good to get in on new things at the beginning, Platform for Prose is currently showcasing the writing selected from its first call for submissions, which will appear in an anthology later in the year. Readers need to be registered users to access the online stories, and registered writers get advance warning of submission windows, although writers don't need to be registered in order to submit.

New is good but so is tried and tested. Charlie Fish has run Fiction on the Web since 1996 ([www.fictionontheweb.co.uk](http://www.fictionontheweb.co.uk)) and although the visuals are basic, the content is lively and frequently updated, with new stories posted every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. Submissions have recently been closed, but open again

Find an audience for your writing by following Webbo's advice on choosing an online showcase that works for you

on 10 October.

If you write in a particular style, why not find a niche showcase for it? Funny writers, for instance, have Brian Huggett's The Short Humour Site ([www.short-humour.org.uk](http://www.short-humour.org.uk)), an international showcase of humorous writing that has been running since 2008. Gentle and non-judgemental in its approach, the site showcases funny writing in many varieties, and Brian is delighted to hear from new contributors. For scriptwriters, there's Simply Scripts ([www.simplyscripts.com](http://www.simplyscripts.com)), which is an online database of hundreds of scripts, screenplays and transcripts, and includes an unproduced script of the day section – writers can submit scripts and script links.

Some showcases are one-offs or annual events, like the Masters Review blog (<https://mastersreview.com>) which publishes a short story showcase each May in honour of Short Story Month. As with everything else in the writing world, keep an eye out for opportunities – or even better, create your own. **W**



# Purely Elemental

'Photoshop's baby brother' has evolved into a powerful and useful tool for writers on a budget, says **Greta Powell**

**A**lthough their main intent is the written word, the majority of writers know that the old adage 'a picture speaks a thousand words' is probably stronger today than it ever was. In the ever-increasing visual environment that now surrounds us all no one needs telling that high-impact images really promote all products, not just books, both online and off. So this month, as well as looking how to create colour splash images for a writers' circle, we also find out how to design effective Facebook profile and banner pictures with the minimum of faff. The software of choice this month is Photoshop Elements, which was once described in this column as 'Photoshop's baby brother'. These days it has evolved into a powerful image editor in its own right, perfect for the home user or those looking to create high impact images easily and quickly.

**Q** We would like to create some black and white shots with one dash of colour in each of them for an online book we are collaborating on in our writers' group. As our picture editing skills are limited to say the least, we wondered what would be the most cost-effective and easy-to-learn piece of software to use to achieve this effect.

**A** At around £80 Adobe Photoshop Elements is quite hard to beat for value and ease of use. Unlike Photoshop and other similar software it has a gentle learning curve, and over the years its features and tools have continually improved without being overly complex, which makes it perfect for anyone looking for a simple solution to editing images.

This technique is referred to as a colour splash and Elements contains a feature called guided edits which virtually automates the process by letting the user retain colour in parts of an image whilst the rest becomes black and white. In actual fact there are a number of ways to achieve this effect but for ease of use this is probably the most straightforward. This is one of Elements' built-in wizards, which walk you step by step through the process and is accessed by going to the Guided tab at the top of the screen and selecting Photo Effects >B&W Colour Pops from the list. You then select the colour range that you want to retain and make 'pop' whilst the rest of the image becomes black and white. There are two other black and white wizards in here that are well worth experimenting with if you have the inclination.

The following tutorials really do walk you through the different processes step by step and the results can be quite striking. The first tutorial from <http://writ.rs/colourbw> shows you how to convert to black and white then using the available edits and tools shows you what can be achieved. The second tutorial is 'a quick 60 second tip' alternative method to achieve this look by using the smart brush: <http://writ.rs/smartbrushtip>

**Q** However hard I try the Facebook profile and cover picture for my self-publishing page never looks right. It is either distorted or is impossible to size properly even after spending ages with the sizing. It would be great to up the game on Facebook and social media but I really do not have the skills necessary to do this. A relative has a copy of Photoshop Elements 13 on her computer and I wondered if that could be used in some way to do the job for me.

**A** Photoshop Elements is full of wizards and quick fixes and you will be pleased to know that one of them happens to be a Facebook cover designer. Just make sure you have a good image to use then in the Quick tab go to 'Create' and select the 'Facebook Cover' wizard and choose a theme from the selection provided. The wizard lets you add your own profile and cover images which can then be rotated, resized and repositioned with fully customised text. Take a few minutes and follow this tutorial which takes you through the whole process from the early layout to publishing it into Facebook at <http://writ.rs/fbelements>

Photoshop Elements is available as a thirty-day trial or can be purchased directly from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

## GET CONNECTED!

If you have a technical query for Greta, please email: [info@curveandlearn.com](mailto:info@curveandlearn.com), or contact her via [www.curveandlearn.com](http://www.curveandlearn.com) or [www.facebook.com/adobetrainingcourses](http://www.facebook.com/adobetrainingcourses)

## Corel Draw

With the onslaught of Adobe a lot of software has long gone but one other option is Corel Draw Suite 7, which is still holding on in the background. If you are looking for an alternative to Adobe then it is worth downloading the trial and taking a look. This version comes complete with all the image editing, page layout and vector illustration tools that you would need. Currently the home edition has a very impressive price tag of £84.99 at PC World.

## A QUICK LOOK BACKWARDS

Just about thirty years ago, in September 1985 the first Amstrad 8256 was launched and was probably the first 'computer' that many writers cut their teeth on. It provided the writer with a word processor and dot matrix printer for around £300 (considerably a lot more money than it is worth today). Perhaps some of you might like to take a quick delve into the past and read an intriguing article in the *Guardian* about writers and early word-processing at <http://writ.rs/amstrad30>



# Helpline

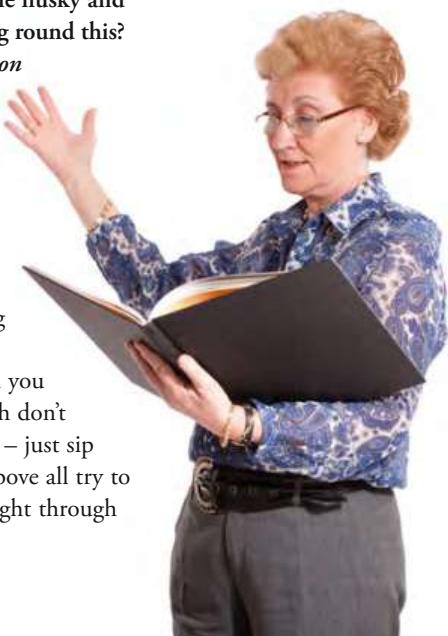
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Email your queries to Diana (please include home-town details) at: [diana@dianacambridge.co.uk](mailto:diana@dianacambridge.co.uk) or send them to: Helpline, **Writing Magazine**, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD. She will answer as many letters as she can on the page, but regrets that she cannot enter into individual correspondence. Publication of answers may take several months. Helpline cannot personally answer queries such as where to offer work, or comment on manuscripts, which you are asked not to send.

**Q** When I am reading aloud on stage, my voice always seems to become husky and I have to cough. Any way of getting round this?

*Mark Cleverly, Bradford on Avon*

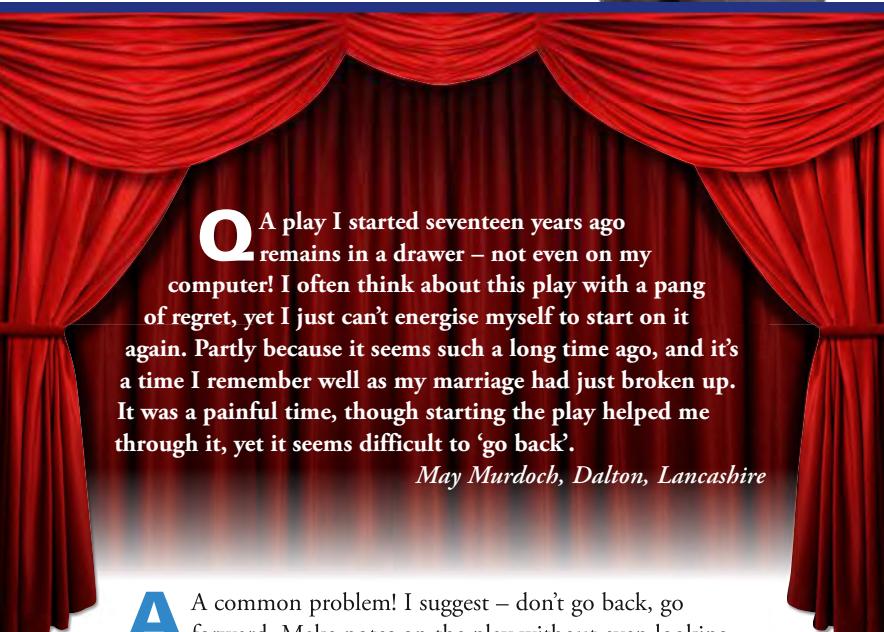
**A** If you speak from your diaphragm, not throat, that will help a lot. It does mean improving your posture and standing straighter. Next, avoid coffee, chocolate, cake, crisps, nuts and biscuits that day – they all clog up your throat. Just drink water. Have some water on the stage with you in case you need it. If you do cough don't draw attention to it by apologising – just sip some water, pause and carry on. Above all try to relax and visualise yourself going right through your reading without coughing.



**Q** A play I started seventeen years ago remains in a drawer – not even on my computer! I often think about this play with a pang of regret, yet I just can't energise myself to start on it again. Partly because it seems such a long time ago, and it's a time I remember well as my marriage had just broken up. It was a painful time, though starting the play helped me through it, yet it seems difficult to 'go back'.

*May Murdoch, Dalton, Lancashire*

**A** A common problem! I suggest – don't go back, go forward. Make notes on the play without even looking at what you've done, and start afresh. Is there a new angle you can introduce? Try working on it for a short period each morning – start as early as you can – rather than the evening. Your mind is fresh then and less likely to shift to nostalgia. Keep a spreadsheet and add the number of words you've done on your play each day. In this situation, you need to see progress – you need to see words building up!



**Q** What is the law regarding reproducing song lyrics in a novel?

I have seen authors like Stephen King always taking a page at the start of a book to assure us that they have permission from whoever owns the publishing rights to reproduce even a single line of lyrics, but I have seen many more books where lyrics were used and no one was credited.

I want to include a scene where a nervous couple sit on a sofa, both too scared to make a move, while watching a music channel. I thought it would be good to throw out an occasional lyric of the song that is playing to describe how they're feeling.

I was under the impression that as long as you credited who wrote and/or recorded the song in the text, and weren't trying to pass it off as your own, that it was okay to reproduce a line or two of lyrics, but another writer friend thinks I'm wrong about this. Can you clarify?

*Philip Henry, Port Stewart, Northern Ireland*

**A** While you might be able to get away with a couple of words – for example *I did it my way* or *all you need is love* or any tag from a song, you do need permission to quote the entire lyric. The music industry can be a minefield for writers. For an example of just how treacherous, see Blake Morrison's account here: <http://writ.rs/lyricsblake>

If you're just using a line to sum up your characters' feelings, you'd still be best quoting the original writer of the song – even though a different group might be singing the song, or even someone who isn't even in the music industry, for example a talent show competitor. Not all writers recognise this principle, which is why you've seen so many books where this was not done. If you Google the lyric plus 'permissions to use' plus the song or songwriter name you should find contact details. If you want to avoid searching for copyrights, you can make up lines that sound like tags from lyrics, or be ironic and change them slightly, for example 'I did it your way' or 'all I need is cash'. I am sure you can think of better examples.



**Q** I'm co-writing a novel with a colleague – we do a chapter each, then pass the work back to the partner who then moves it on with the next chapter. It's really a historical romance but with quite a bit of humour. Where do we go when it's completed – is there a market for this? Will we get more publicity since we've co-written it, and is that what we should flag up?

*Anya Furness, Telford, Shropshire*

**A** Everything depends on the content. The fact that you've co-written it will provide an extra dimension and interest to bookshops, for readings, and for publicity. I'm sure an audience will want to know the pros and cons of working this way, why you chose to write in this way, and whether you had any conflict over the content. So I think the co-writing aspect is a plus. The market for historical romance with humour? You've only to look at the number of Jane Austen take-offs to see that there's definitely a readership. As to where you submit your book – *Writers & Artists Yearbook* remains the one true Bible for publisher and agent contact details. Really worth investing in.

**Q** I have had a couple of meetings with agents who seemed to be interested in my novel. I get very nervous before these meetings and know I don't do myself justice. Neither of these agents has progressed my work, or taken it on, though both said they liked it. I know that they want confident authors who can do book readings and suchlike – whereas I become full of anxiety.

*Simon Jay, Glastonbury*

**A** Another common problem. A trick I was given by a hypnotherapist was to work on visualising the end of the meeting – seeing yourself saying goodbye, smiling, knowing the meeting has gone well. You could try this every night for a week or two before the meeting. Also remember that it's the content of the work which is key, and sometimes shy authors are liked more than ebullient overpowering types. You can even make a feature of being shy, and attract writers who are also shy (and that's an awful lot of writers!) to your readings. Also, remember that it's your work and you are really hiring an agent, not the other way round. I know that the competition for an agent seems to oppose this concept: yet it's true. So you can be more confident knowing this, but also taking the agent's advice. Once two agents express an interest in your work, you'll see how it is – you are the one doing the hiring.



## Déjà vu all over again

**Patrick Forsyth** applauds revisiting past work in search of new opportunities

**S**cience fiction is a genre wide in extent. Some snootily dismiss it as a lesser form of fiction, but I must say that I love some of it, mostly well-written hard science fiction. The genre is one with a good deal of interesting activity amongst writers: it has more than its fair share of short stories and anthologies, of co-written books and of series, often closely linked sequels.

I am currently reading *The Hercules Text* by one of my favourite sci-fi writers, Jack McDevitt, who has had more than twenty novels published. This one was an early success for the author, being published nearly thirty years ago in 1986. However the copy I am reading was published this year and is described as a 'revised' edition with a foreword explaining how so. The book has had considerable change and matters going on in the world, for instance the likelihood of nuclear war, computers and other issues of technology have all been altered to make the book more credible. Some may see such revision and reissue as a cynical ploy to sell more copies, not that I have anything against action to sell more copies, but I think there is a good lesson here.

Any writer may look back in their archive, both published and unpublished, and see opportunities for revisions that will make the work more relevant now than it was six months, six years or longer ago. The work such revision will take is probably far less than starting something new (though do that too) and may give you additional sales to swell your portfolio. With *The Hercules Text* many readers will probably not even noticed it was available in a different form long ago, and others, like me, will enjoy rereading it in its new form. **Wm**



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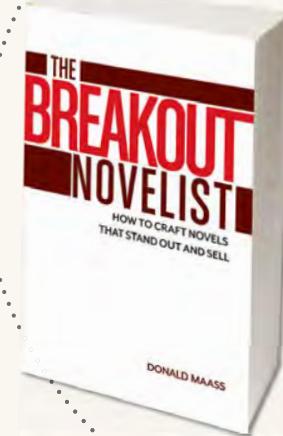
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# Beyond Google

There's more to search engines than Google, says author and publisher **Dr Tarja Moles**

**W**hen you're thinking of doing research online, Google is most likely the first search engine that comes to mind. However, there are numerous other options available, and some of them might be more appropriate or useful for your research.

All search engines differ in terms of their scope, how they search for information and organise their respective results lists. It's worth noting that no search engine checks every single webpage that's online. Choosing a search engine is, therefore, ultimately a matter of preference.

Regardless of which search engine you decide to use, remember this: if you can't find what you're after by using one search engine, try another one.

Here are some alternatives to Google that you might want to consider:

## Well-known general search engines

Bing ([www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com)) and Yahoo! ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) are the most popular search engines after Google so they are well worth experimenting with. You don't necessarily need to use both as Yahoo! is powered by Bing and therefore you will get the same search results. However, their respective results pages look a little different so you might want to see which one you prefer.

## Metasearch engines

Metasearching refers to getting the best combined results from several search engines, directories and various documents all at once. This means that metasearch engines can get you more relevant results more quickly than if you were to type your keywords in one general search engine and then trying another.

Whenever your research topic is obscure, or when your research focus is very narrow, and you're struggling to find relevant results through general search engines, have a go at a metasearch engine, such as at Dogpile ([www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com)), Zoo ([www.zoo.com](http://www.zoo.com)), ZapMeta ([www.zapmeta.com](http://www.zapmeta.com)) or WebCrawler ([www.webcrawler.com](http://www.webcrawler.com)).

## Question and answer search engines

Generally speaking, there are two types of question and answer search engines: those that contain human answers and those that contain automatic answers.

Answers ([www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)), Quora ([www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com)) and eHow ([www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com)) can be categorised as human answer search engines. They all use human editors/volunteers who answer people's questions and solve their problems. While Quora's scope includes anything and everything, Answers focuses on giving information for consumers and eHow provides practical solutions to problems that aim to make everyday life better and easier.

An example of an automatic answer search engine is Wolfram|Alpha ([www.wolframalpha.com](http://www.wolframalpha.com)). It's a computational knowledge engine that answers factual questions. It does this through dynamic computations that are based on a huge collection of in-built data, algorithms and methods. Whether you're looking for historical weather information, occupational statistics or demographic data in specific locations, it's all there. The easiest way to learn to use Wolfram|Alpha is to click on 'Examples' to explore what kind of information is available and then use the prompts to construct your searches.

## Search engines for specific content

There are numerous search engines that concentrate on specific types of content. For instance, BASE ([www.base-search.net](http://www.base-search.net)) is one of the world's largest academic search engines and it's operated by Bielefeld University Library. It specialises in open access web resources and covers over 70 million documents. In addition to using the search engine, you can browse the database.

Zanran ([www.zanran.com](http://www.zanran.com)) is a search engine for data and statistics. It helps you find numerical data that are presented online as graphs, tables and charts. Conventional search engines can struggle to find this kind of information

as they are generally more geared towards searching text-based material (although their image-finding capabilities have improved significantly over the last years).

If you're interested in genealogy, you may find Mocavo ([www.mocavo.com](http://www.mocavo.com)), a family history search engine, helpful. It allows you to conduct searches as well as browse the site's records and datasets by category, location or date.

## Discovery search engines

When you use well-known search engines, you're bound to come across the same most popular sites again and again. MillionShort (<https://millionshort.com>), an experimental/discovery search engine, mixes things up a little: it allows you to remove the top million websites (or the top 100K, 10K, 1K or 100) from your search results and explore what kinds of results are listed after that.

As most people don't look at results beyond pages one and two, it's possible you might be missing content that is really useful. Of course there are no guarantees that you'll find the most amazing content by doing this, but there's a chance – especially if your topic area is well-covered on the web – that you stumble upon sites that you'd never have found otherwise. It's worth a try!

## Private search engines

Whenever you're doing online searches, the major search engines record your search data. If you prefer not to be tracked, there are search engines, such as DuckDuckGo (<https://duckduckgo.com>) and Ixquick (<https://ixquick.com>), that won't capture your IP address or use tracking cookies to make a record of your search terms, the links you click on and the time you visit your chosen sites.



There are many more search engines to choose from than what was included in this column, but the above will get you started. Don't be afraid to experiment with different search engines. You don't need to restrict yourself to Google/Bing/Yahoo! just because they feel familiar. You never know, you might find a search engine, or a few, that suit you better than the one you've always been using.

## Find more search engines

To find even more search engines, check out Wikipedia's list on <http://bit.ly/1FATXmv>

# Finding a voice through fanfic

## SOPHIE JACKSON

Sophie Jackson's fan fiction got 4.5 million online hits before she was snapped up by a major for her first novel, she tells **Margaret James**



**D**ebut novelist Sophie Jackson's *A Pound of Flesh* is the first in a series for new adults and older readers featuring deeply-troubled characters, strong emotions and compelling storylines. A tale that is partly set in a tough US prison, *A Pound of Flesh* proves yet again that romantic and relationship fiction can be every bit as gritty, edgy and page-turning as crime, mystery or indeed any other genre.

A 33-year-old English teacher from Chorley in Lancashire, Sophie was born in Inverness but moved to Lytham St Annes when she was a few weeks old. She stayed there until she was fifteen, when she moved to Chorley.

Where did those writing genes come from?

'Well, Mum is exceptionally good at English,' she says. 'She's a crossword ninja who loves to read and she instilled a love of reading in me. When I was little she'd buy me a new book at least once a month. The books were always harder than those I'd be given at primary school and so I was challenged from an early age.'

'I didn't start writing stories until I was about nine or ten and, when my grades came through, I realised I wasn't too bad at it. I think Mum still has those stories somewhere.'

*'A Pound of Flesh'* was inspired by Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. I was given a copy of the first book by a group of my Year 11 girls who had read it and were obsessed. At first, I was reluctant to read it. But, once I'd started, I finished it in about six hours and ordered the other three books to arrive the following day. I devoured them all then read them all again.

'I loved the characters so much that I found myself wanting to learn more about them and also to see them in

different scenarios and settings. That's when I found *Twilight* fan fiction. The talent in the *Twilight* fanfic world is incredible and I spent days trawling through story after story, growing more and more excited by the idea of writing my own. When I posted the first chapter of my first ever fanfic and got eleven reviews, I was ecstatic.'

Sophie's fan fiction went on to attract 4.5 million online reads, over 21,000 reviews, a number of fandom awards, a top London literary agent, an offer from Headline in the UK, and finally a six-figure advance from US publishing giant Simon and Schuster.

'I wrote a couple more "fluffy" fics before *A Pound of Flesh*, one of which got quite a lot of hits and reviews, but soon I knew I wanted to write something a little darker,' she says. 'At first, *A Pound of Flesh* was set in a high school. But that imposed limits on what the characters could do, so I aged them ten years and moved them to a prison. I researched prisons in

New York, looking at different types of crimes, various kinds of felons, finding out how much time someone would serve for a specific offence and so on. Then I began to write.'

'I had a concept, a middle and an end in view, and these were surrounded by key events. But, other than that, almost everything else was done on a wing and a prayer. I knew how I wanted the characters to meet and how the twist would be revealed, but that was all.'

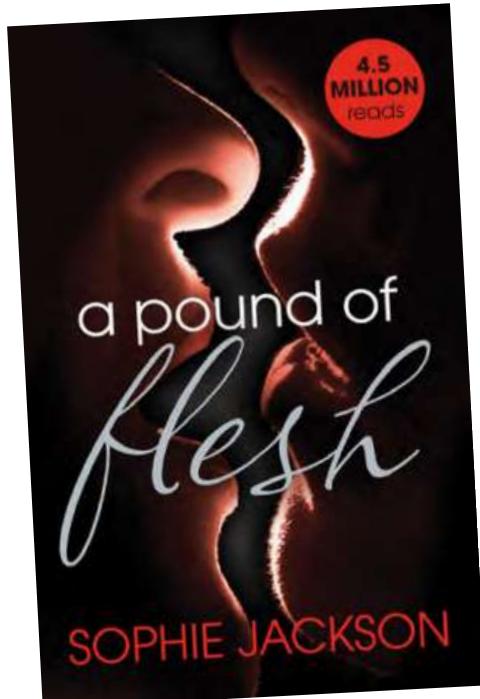
'I originally wrote the book as fan fiction and I feel this made structuring it a lot easier. I posted a chapter, I got comments, and these comments definitely affected where the story went next.'

The heroine of *A Pound of Flesh* is feisty but vulnerable Kat Lane, who signs up to teach English literature in a men's prison as a way of honouring and upholding the legacy of her father who was murdered when she was a child.

But who is the hero?

'It's Wes Carter, a convicted felon who could perhaps be described as a bad boy,' says Sophie. 'But he's not an evil man. He's made some bad choices and has certainly behaved badly at times because he's misguided and he's been too loyal for his own good. But, for me, bad boy is almost a term of endearment. I think readers and writers alike enjoy meeting good bad boys because there's something very mysterious and dangerous about them that is, oddly, very sexy – at least in the literary world!'

Sophie's dialogue sparkles, so it's no surprise to learn she enjoys writing it. 'I guess dialogue is, above all else, what helps to ground my work in reality,' she says. 'While I'm reading other people's work, it's the aspect to which I pay most attention, and my own dialogue is



the thing I mull over and edit the most. I love dialogue that's realistic, snappy and true to the character. So, for me, as long as what a character says stays believable and representative of who they are on the page, it doesn't matter where a story is set or what happens in it. I always know when my own dialogue works because I'll think to myself: yeah, if I was that person, that's what I'd say, too.'

As a busy teacher working full time, when does Sophie write? 'At the moment, whenever I have a spare five minutes, which isn't often,' she admits. 'I'm much more productive in the evenings. Mornings are evil and should be banned. Annoyingly, I can write only when the inspiration hits. But, when it does, I can get 2,000-plus words down in one sitting. I have to be very organised and, to be honest, I'm not very good at it, but I'm getting there. Over the past year I've learned I have to prioritise everything. I write lists – lots of lists.'

'Luckily, my friends and family have all accepted that in order to meet book deadlines or mark exams for work I occasionally need to live like a hermit. It's definitely about taking each day as it comes. Deep breaths, wine and stretches help!'

What's next for Sophie, fiction-wise?

'I'm just about to finish Max's story, *An Ounce of Hope*, which picks up from where the epilogue in *A Pound of Flesh* left off,' she says. 'Various hints about Max's past are scattered throughout *A*

*Pound of Flesh*, but this second book gives readers a chance to see what really happened to Max and to find out what he has to live with from day to day.'

'It's been a hard story to write. It deals with some sensitive themes, but I've fallen in love with Max and the other characters. So I'm really excited about it.'

**Website:** <http://sophiejacksonauthor.com>

### SOPHIE'S TOP TIPS

- Read everything you can get your hands on, because it's extremely important to know what your own potential readership likes, what's popular and what works.
- Listen to your editors. They know what they're talking about. It's so easy to be precious about your work – I'm terrible in this respect – but I've learned that editors know what moves your story along and what slows it down. Take their advice and use it.
- Never give up!

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# WRITERS' NEWS

Your essential monthly round-up of competitions, paying markets, opportunities to get into print and publishing industry news.

## Authors rally in aid of refugees

BY TINA JACKSON



Carnegie Medal and Costa-winning YA author Patrick Ness has harnessed social media and writer-power to raise almost £600,000 (as WM went to press) in aid of Syrian refugees.

On 3 September, as the tragic image of drowned Alan Kurdi brought home the plight of the refugees attempting to reach Europe, *A Monster Calls* author Patrick began fundraising. 'Hey, this may not work, but I'm tired of just tweeting my despair about the current refugee crisis,' he posted. 'I'll match all funds raised up to £10,000 for

Save The Children, which helps refugees around the world and has put out an appeal for the current Syrian refugee disaster. Let's see if we can give them £20,000 together, yeah? Or whatever! Everything helps.'

When it looked as if donations were likely to hit £10,000, Patrick tweeted 'Anyone out there want to match the \*second\* £10,000?' Fellow YA author John Green succinctly replied 'I'll match the next £10,000.'

'I genuinely thought we'd get a little bit of money,' Patrick told *WN*. 'But only a fraction of what it's done. But when we hit £20,000 in the first two hours, then I thought it would do something.'

Derek Landy joined in. 'Good God. If it goes over the £20,000 I'll match the next ten.' An anonymous donor added another £10,000, and Jojo Moyes offered to match the next ten grand.

From there it snowballed. Writers and publishers including Marian Keyes, Philip Pullman, David Nicholls, Anthony Horovitz, Jessie Burton, Jill Mansell, Louisa Young, Francesca Simons, Andersen Press, Walker Books, Candlewick Press, Hachette and Random House all stepped up to match £10,000 donations.

When the mounting total reached almost half a million pounds, a delirious Patrick posted: 'I know these things have a natural life and

I'm so far beyond what I ever expected, so I just want to say, wherever it goes, this has been the most extraordinary 72 hours of my entire life in YA. You guys have been incredible, simply incredible. Thank you.'

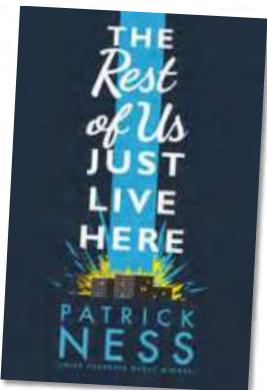
As WM went to press, there had been 6,678 donors and donations of £595,259.94 (with Gift Aid, £674,004.07). 'Passing a million dollars was extraordinary,' said American-born Patrick. 'A million dollars. It's incredible. The bulk of it has come from the YA community and from women who write novels. It really shows the good-heartedness and humanity and wanting to reach out of that community.'

Save the Children's Tanya Steele told Virgin Moneygiving: 'It is absolutely mind blowing what social media can do. This shows that it takes just one person to have a kind and generous idea that inspires so many others. Patrick's idea has snowballed with more and more people across the globe getting involved. The incredible amount that Patrick's crowdfunder has raised so far will have a huge impact on our efforts to help refugee children.'

The money raised will be used by Save the Children to provide food, shelter and support for refugees, said Tanya. 'We are giving food and shelter to families who are on the move and sleeping rough, as well as helping unaccompanied children to access services and understand their rights, and ensuring they have care and support.' The programme follows child refugees and their families all the way along the journey,' said Patrick.

After a rollercoaster fortnight, Patrick is: 'Exhausted! It came out of a moment of anger and despair, and what has happened is thrilling, empowering and so, so positive. There are so many people out there who want to do a good thing.'

**Website:** <http://writ.rs/patricknessfundraising>



## New prize for ecopoems



The Resurgence Poetry Prize, founded in 2014 and launched this year, is the world's first major prize for 'ecopoetry', and offers a first prize of £5,000 for a poem on ecological themes. There is a second prize of £2,000 and a third prize of £1,000.

The prize operates under the auspices of the Resurgence Trust, which publishes *Resurgence & Ecologist* magazine.

All entries must be original and unpublished poems under 54 lines. To be eligible, entries must in some way (thematically, structurally, linguistically or formally) examine the relationship between human beings and the natural world. One of the judging criteria is a poem's suitability for being spoken aloud; the winning poets will be expected to read their poems on the radio.

Poets may enter online or by post. For online entrants, the accepted file types are doc, docx, rtf, pdf and txt. The poet's name must not appear on the manuscript. The filename must be either the title or the first

line of the poem. There is a fee of £7 for the first poem and £3 for any subsequent poems, which may be paid by credit or debit card through the online submission system. Postal entrants must complete an entry form, which may be downloaded from the website, and should pay their entry form by cheques payable to The Resurgence Poetry Prize.

The closing date is 1 November.

**Details:** **The Resurgence Poetry Prize,** c/o Aditus, First Floor, 10 Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1BR; website: [www.resurgenceprize.org](http://www.resurgenceprize.org)

## UK SHORT STORY MARKET

### *A feast can be any size you like*

BY TINA JACKSON

*Take a Break's Fiction Feast* has discarded its minimum word count of 750 words as it wishes to publish a wide variety of stories in terms of length. Submissions of any length up to 3,000 words are welcomed.

'*Take a Break* are essentially looking for short stories up to and including 3,000 words with a strong plot and/or a compelling twist in the tail,' said fiction editor Norah McGrath. 'A wide variety of subjects is welcome, including romance, crime, offbeat, macabre, science fiction, spooky tales or almost anything else suitable for our target audience of women in their mid-twenties upwards. All writers with any level of experience are welcome to submit their work. We look forwards to hearing from you.'

Stories under 1,200 need to have a strong plot and a twist in the tail. Longer stories need not feature a twist but must have a compelling plot. All stories should be contemporary, self-contained and aimed at women in their mid-20s and upwards. Straightforward romance, stories with a historical background and science fiction are not wanted, and neither are stories narrated by animals or small children.

Stories are short, so it's recommended to have no more than four characters. Send original, unpublished stories by post, including a title page with all contact details and an accurate wordcount. Include an SAE.

Payment for a one-page story is £200. Two-page stories are paid £250, and stories up to 2,000 words between £325 and £400.

**Details:** Norah McGrath, Fiction Editor, *Take a Break's Fiction Feast*, Academic House, 24-28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DT; website: [www.takeabreak.co.uk](http://www.takeabreak.co.uk)



### Brave new alternatives

Could you script an alternative ending to one of the most influential dystopian novels ever written? To tie in with the world premiere of Dawn King's touring theatre adaptation of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* with the Touring Consortium Theatre Company, writers are invited to send in a script of no more than five minutes that takes place before, after or as an alternative ending to the book.

Ten winners will be invited to take part in a one-day playwriting workshop led by actor Nigel Planer in Birmingham in January.

All submissions will be published online on Theatrecloud. To submit, writers must be registered with Theatrecloud. Entries must be uploaded through the website.

Entry is free. The closing date is 31 December.

**Website:** <http://writ.rs/bravenewending>

### Flashes of brilliance

Brilliant Flash Fiction is an Irish online flash fiction zine which runs monthly, well paid competitions. Editor and owner Aurore Lebas wants 'creative, soulful writing' which takes chances and wants fiction which will move the reader.

She defines flash fiction as stories up to 1,000 words. All entries must be original, unpublished work, but can be in any genre, 'sci-fi, memoir, historic fiction, etc'. Prose poetry is not welcomed.

Submit your story in the body of an email as well as attaching it as a doc file. Response time is 'within three months'. Payment is the prizes, a share of anthology rights if the story is also accepted for the anthology and all rights remain with the author.

**Details:** email: [brilliantflashfiction@gmail.com](mailto:brilliantflashfiction@gmail.com); website: <https://brilliantflashfictionmag.wordpress.com>

## Big winners this month

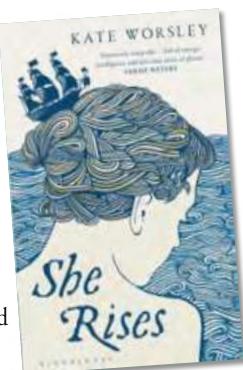


UK author, physicist and opera librettist Jonathan Tel has won the £5,000 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for *The Human Phonograph*. In 2014 he was shortlisted for the 2014 *Sunday Times* EFG Short Story Award. The regional winners of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, who each receive £2,500, are *Light*, Lesley Nneka Arimah (Nigeria), *The Umbrella Man*, Siddhartha Gigoo (India), *The King of Settlement 4*, Kevin Jared Hosein (Trinidad) and *Famished Eels*, Mary Rokonadravu (Fiji).

Marc Phillips has won the Moth Short Story Prize for *Pyjama Squid*. The runners up were *December Swimmers* by Paul Lenehan and *Pride Goes* by Richard Newton. Judge Donal Ryan also

highly commended stories by Wendy Riley, Gerard McKeown, Laura Morgan and Sean Lusk.

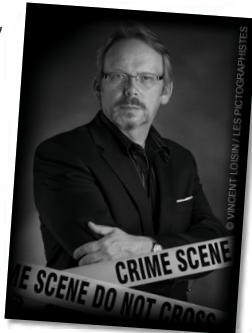
Kate Worsley has won the biennial £2,000 New Angle Prize for Literature with her debut novel *She Rises*, which was published by Bloomsbury in March last year. The runner-up for the prize, given for the best book with a strong East Anglian theme, was Ronald Blythe's *The Time by the Sea*.



The Bloody Scotland crime-writing festival announced Craig Russell (right) as the winner of its fourth annual £1,000 Scottish Crime Book of the Year Award for his novel *The Ghosts of Altona*, the latest in his Hamburg-set series of Jan Fabel thrillers. The Bloody Scotland International Short Story Competition, also worth £1,000, was won by Jamie

Groves for *The Mystery of the Mallaig Train*.

The novels in the running for the *Guardian* First Book Award are: *Man v Nature*, Diane Cook; *Mrs Engels*, Gavin McCrea; *Physical*, Andrew McMillan; *The Fish Ladder*, Katharine Norbury; *The Fishermen*, Chigozie Obioma; *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, Peter Pomerantsev; *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, Max Porter, and *The Shore*, Sara Taylor.



The writers who have been named as Gladstone's Library's writers in residence for 2016 are Rebecca Farmer, Natasha Pulley, Amy Liptrot and Susan Barker. Each writer will spend a month at Gladstone's Library in the first third of next year.

## FLASHES

The winter issue of *The First Line* has a deadline of 1 November for stories beginning: 'George pressed the call button and said, "Mrs Whitfield, you have a visitor." **Website:** [www.thefirstline.com/submission.htm](http://www.thefirstline.com/submission.htm)

David Higgins edits *Venue*, a listings magazine for Bristol and Bath. He invites ideas for features, profiles and interviews. Payment is £9.90 for 100 words. **Details:** *Venue Publishing, Bristol News & Media, Temple Way, Bristol BS99 7HD; tel: 0117 942 8491; email: editor@venue.co.uk*

Joseph Coelho picked up the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) children's poetry award for his first solo poetry collection *Werewolf Club Rules!*, illustrated by John O'Leary, winning £1,000 and a specially bound copy of his book.

'We were wrong about the internet. For around a decade we have assumed that it was killing print. It isn't. What the internet has done is severely undermine the ability of publishers to charge for printed newspapers and magazines when so much information is available for free online.' **Dominic Ponsford, editor, Press Gazette**



Brash by name and brash by nature, this American publisher claims to 'publish the best crime novels in existence.' Certainly many of their authors have won awards and critical acclaim. The editors publish all forms of crime fiction, 'psychological thrillers, murder mysteries, international espionage, and police procedurals'. They welcome established masters and new voices.

Manuscripts must be complete before submission. Check out the website, view the submissions video there and the brief guidelines. Submit a well-edited manuscript in a standard publishing format. First email the opening two chapters, no more than 25 pages, plus a double-spaced, under two page synopsis.

## Get your scary stories twisted

Twisted Tales is a competition from Create50 to find the writers of the 50 scary stories that will form the content of a new horror anthology, *Twisted*.

The stories in *Twisted* will all be short and scary: a horror fiction version of pulp fiction. There is no minimum word count, but the maximum is 2,000.

The first prize winner will receive £250, an Android tablet, Scrivener writing software and a mystery prize. The second prize winner gets £100, Scrivener writing software and a mystery prize, and the third prize winner will be awarded Scrivener writing software and a mystery prize.

All stories in *Twisted* need to be set in the modern world.

Twisted Tales is writing community participation event as well as a competition, and submitting writers are asked to be active in giving feedback to other writers. Before submitting stories, set up a profile page. Writers entering the competition should submit a minimum of two stories (one a spooky tale; one that they are scared to write), which must be original and unpublished, and may supply up to three drafts, including their original one. All stories must have an original title. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript, which should be a Word doc rtf, double-spaced in 12pt Times New Roman.

There is a submission fee of £5 per story. The closing date is 30 November.

**Website:** <http://twisted-vol1.create50.com/twisted-vol1>

## GLOBAL CRIME MARKET

### Bold as Brash

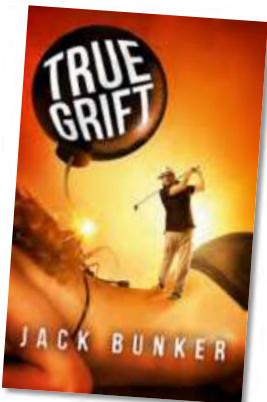
BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON

Send Microsoft Word or pdf files. The editors will then contact the author (or the agent) for a complete manuscript if they like what they read.'

The Brash editors will also republish out of print crime novels or thrillers which 'have earned enthusiastic praise from major reviewers and authors, or have been finalists for, or winners of, top literary awards like the Edgar Award, Shamus Award, National Book Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, etc.' Make an email query first with the titles, their best reviews and awards they've won or been nominated for.

Response time is 'reasonable'. Payments, royalties etc are discussed under contract.

**Details:** [email: brashbooks@gmail.com](mailto:brashbooks@gmail.com); **website:** [www.brash-books.com](http://www.brash-books.com)



## Score a submission to Shooter



*Shooter* literary magazine is inviting submissions for its next issue on the theme of 'surreal'.

Writers interested in submitting to issue 3 of *Shooter*, which launched in January this year to support emerging writers of literary fiction, creative non-fiction, narrative journalism and poetry, may send literary fiction, narrative non-fiction and narrative journalism between 2,000 and 7,500 words, and poetry. Submit one story or up to three

poems. All work must be original and unpublished. Non-fiction or journalistic work submitted to *Shooter* will be fact-checked. All work submitted for this issue should be appropriate to the theme.

Include a brief biography in the submission covering letter, noting any prior publishing experience.

Submissions should be sent by email by the closing date of 25 October.

*Shooter* pays £25 for each piece of accepted fiction, and £5 per poem.

**Details:** [email: submissions@shooterlitmag@gmail.com](mailto:submissions@shooterlitmag@gmail.com); **website:** <http://shooterlitmag.com>

## A flash of inspiration

Do you live or work in London? If so, chances are you use the Tube.

Tubeflash is an idiosyncratic new writing initiative that has paired twelve London Underground stations with twelve brooches from the collection of The Casket of Delights' Joanna Sterling, who came up with the project, which is now backed by Spread the Word, The City Lit, BBC Arts and Transport for London.

New 300-word flash fiction entries are invited, inspired by a station or brooch from the Tubeflash online gallery. Submit through the website. The closing date is 31 October.

**Website:** [www.tubeflash.co.uk](http://www.tubeflash.co.uk)

## GLOBAL ROMANCE MARKET

*Don't swerve this  
romance e-opportunity*

BY TINA JACKSON

SMP Swerve is the new romance digital-first arm at St Martin's Press, which is part of major publisher Macmillan in the US.

'St Martin's Press has been publishing quality e-originals since 2011,' said Swerve publishing director Anne-Marie Tallberg. 'We look at e-originals as a unique format with a unique audience and are always on the lookout for fresh voices and hardworking authors. Some of our e-original authors have hit the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestsellers lists, including Kylie Scott, Sara Fawkes and Donna Grant. A branded digital romance line dedicated to bringing more quality romance stories to readers was the next logical step and Swerve was born.'

Anne-Marie believes that e-publishing enables writers (and readers!) to give free rein to their imaginations. 'Ebooks have certainly opened the door for genre-bending and experimentation with wild, risky new storylines (like billionaire bear shapeshifter ménage stories, for instance)', she said. 'There's definitely a hunger for new, never-before-seen romantic scenarios in the e-book realm, and we're happy to oblige. We've got some risky new stories coming up – dystopian Vikings, male/male rockstars in love, cage fighter heroes and werebears just to name a few! We are always looking for fresh voices and stories that deliver an amazing read.' Over the coming weeks, Swerve will announce specific calls for submission.

Swerve publishes all sub-genres of romance, and is actively inviting submissions from authors around the world – it is looking to publish more than 100 titles in 2016. 'A good book for Swerve would be a romance that is so compelling you need to finish in one sitting and then talk about it with anyone who will listen!' said Anne-Marie. 'We are looking for novellas 25,000–40,000 words and full-length works 50,000–100,000 words. We are pretty flexible as long as the story is compelling and complete.'

Anne-Marie is particularly keen to hear from authors with whom Swerve can develop a continuing relationship. 'We are always looking for fresh talent and what we are most interested in are authors we care passionately about and that we feel we can grow in wonderful ways. We are interested in authors and their careers. As Swerve continues to grow we want to create stars or help those who are already stars reach even higher heights.'

All Swerve titles will be published as ebooks compatible with all reading devices and available from all major retailers. Authors will be offered the option of receiving an advance and royalties or higher royalty rates with no advance. Royalties will be based on net publisher receipts and will be paid quarterly.

Submit through the online submission system.

Website: <http://us.macmillan.com/static/smp/swerve/>

## Comp for flash opening chapters

The Flash 500 Novel Opening Chapter and Synopsis Competition is open for entries.

The winners will have their work judged by editors from leading independent genre publishers Crooked Cat. The winner will receive £500, with £200 for the runner-up.

The competition, now in its third year, is for an opening chapter up to 3,000 words plus a one-page synopsis outlining the balance of the story. If the opening chapter is longer than 3,000 words, send the first 3,000 and state that the chapter continues beyond that point.

Entries should be sent by email as two separate doc or pdf attachments (chapter and synopsis), with Novel Opening in the email subject line. Include your name and novel's title in the body of the submission email. Before emailing the entry, complete the online payment process. Payment is £10 and may be paid by PayPal, or credit or debit card.

The closing date is 31 October.

Details: email: [entry@flash500.com](mailto:entry@flash500.com); website: [www.flash500.com](http://www.flash500.com)



## It's a Funny Old World

A computer model able to rate how funny puns are has been developed by Justine Kao, a psychologist at Stanford University, California. The puns were then tested against real people to see if they agreed with the programme's findings, reported Dina Rickman in *The Independent*.

Details of the research were published in *Cognitive Science*, and the puns that the computer model and humans judged to be funniest, appeared on i100.co.uk, including these:

- Herb gardeners who work extra get thyme and a half.
- Last night, I kept dreaming that I had written Lord of the Rings. The wife said I'd been Tolkien in my sleep.
- An electrician is a bright spark who knows what's watt.

*The New Scientist* asked Tim Vine (pictured), known for his one-liners and puns, what he thought. 'I absolutely would never use a computer to tell me what is funny. I use one thing and one thing only. The audience. And it has to be an audience of humans,' he said.

Here's one of Tim's puns: I've got a friend who's fallen in love with two school bags. He's bi-satchel.



- Cockney rhyming slang, believed to date from the 1840s, could soon be 'brown bread' (dead), we learned from Mark Duell writing for Mailonline.

'Phrases such as "Ruby Murray" (curry), and "Donald Duck" (luck)... are among the famous sayings that cannot be identified by many Britons aged 18 to 24, a poll found.'

• In her recent book, *Between You & Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen*, Mary Norris, who writes for the *New Yorker*, makes punctuation interesting', reported Gary Nunn, a regular contributor to *Mind your language* in the *Guardian*.

Exclamation marks, she wrote are 'a bit grim, even worrying'. The asterisks used in swearwords... are 'little firecrackers inside the words'. The 'superfluous hyphen', inserted by the copy editor, in *Moby-Dick* 'stuck like a harpoon in Melville's famous title'. Semicolons are a form of over-educated punctuation: 'commas with vibrato'.

Gary decided to 'bring some fun' into punctuation.

If each punctuation mark were a person ...

'The full stop is the no-nonsense northern matriarch – She doesn't do garrulous, only concise. Her sentences are short. And to the point...'

'The semicolon is disgusted of Tunbridge Wells – Far too refined, articulate and supercilious to resort to exclamation marks, he mansplains his outrage using semicolons to indicate his intelligence and superiority...'

'The ampersand is the verbose backpacker – Oh my God like it was just so totally amazing & it wasn't even that expensive & that's like really important because I'm on my gap year & my money is fast running out...'



## FLASHES

Graham Houston is now editor of *Boxing Monthly*. Articles on all aspects of professional and amateur boxing are welcomed but contact first with ideas and to negotiate payment. **Details:** Topwave Ltd, 40 Morpeth Road, London E9 7LD; tel: 0208 986 4141; email: [mail@boxingmonthly.co.uk](mailto:mail@boxingmonthly.co.uk)

Kevin Ward edits daily newspaper *South Wales Argus*. News and features of relevance to Gwent are welcomed. Payment is £40 for 500-600 word features and £20 for news (350 words). **Details:** Cardiff Road, Maesglas, Newport NP20 3QN; tel: 01633 810000; email: [newsdesk@gwent-wales.co.uk](mailto:newsdesk@gwent-wales.co.uk)

Hachette Children's has hired Maria B Campbell Associates as literary scouts to the group to look for books for imprints Hodder Children's Books, Orchard Books, Orion Children's Books, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers and Quercus Children's Books.

An 8,000 word short story called *Temperature* by F Scott Fitzgerald, discovered at Princeton University, New Jersey (his alma mater), has been published 76 years after it was written, *The Daily Telegraph* reported.

'I genuinely believe publishing is entering a golden age. There are more people reading than ever.' **Charlie Redmayne,** HarperCollins UK CEO

## UK MAGAZINE MARKET

### *Know this magazine before submitting*

BY JENNY ROCHE

Emphasising the advice to 'study the market' *The People's Friend* magazine has detailed writer's guidelines and a range of tips sheets for submitting pocket novels, short stories, serials and features. To hone any submissions further there is also a breakdown of the magazine's readership and what kind of things they like, and don't like to read.

Feature articles can be about almost anything but it is advised you begin by trying your hand with a 'Filler Feature' of 750-1,000 words. Photographs are welcome but don't send more than two.

Pocket novels are single-volume 40,000-42,000 word stories that would usually be serialised in the magazine.

Short stories are 1,200-3,000 words long although stories up to 4,000 are welcome for the magazine's specials.

Serials usually run to 8-10 instalments with an opening episode of 6,000 words and subsequent instalments of 5,000 words with 3-5 chapters or scenes. For serials it is advised you first try writing short stories. In the early stages a serial is worked on by the author and at least one member of staff. There is more detailed information on writing and structuring a serial on the website.



For all fiction the characters are important and should be believable people the reader can care about, sympathise and emphasise with. Unusual, offensive or outrageous characters are not the thing for this magazine.

There should be a strong emotional situation for the characters and stories

should be positive and most important of all, have warmth. The light hearted and humorous is always welcome. Stories with controversial subjects and that are depressing or bitter are not welcomed. Also not wanted are stories that shock, disgust or upset because of graphic content.

The time period in stories is not so important although it shouldn't be too distantly historical, and the setting can be in the UK or abroad. Christmas and other seasonal stories are welcome and should be submitted at least three months in advance with the envelope marked with the season.

For all *The People's Friend* stories the writing should be natural and conversational in style. Dialogue is important as it can provide background information, keep the story moving along and will hold characters in the reader's mind.

When submitting work use double spacing on single sides of numbered A4 pages. Include a cover sheet with the title, word count and your name, address and contact details. Enclose a SAE for a response and return of your work. If submitting by post, paperclip the pages together and use an A4 envelope so your work is not folded.

For pocket novels, send a synopsis and the first three chapters to: [tsteel@dcthomson.co.uk](mailto:tsteel@dcthomson.co.uk)

For serials, send an idea, a few pages of story and a detailed synopsis of how the story develops. Send both serials and short stories addressed to the fiction editor and address features to the features team.

**Details:** *The People's Friend*, DC Thomson & Co Ltd, 80 Kingsway East, Dundee DD4 8SL; website: [www.thepeoplefriend.co.uk/footer/guidelines/](http://www.thepeoplefriend.co.uk/footer/guidelines/)



## Magic SF opportunity

*Black Girls Are Magic* is a new quarterly online magazine launching in January 2016 and looking for speculative fiction by and/or about black women. The main character of any submitted story must be a black female, and the story must include some element of science fiction, dark fantasy, horror, magical realism or surrealism. No graphically violent horror – any 'horror' element should be subtle. No weak women being rescued by 'alpha males', no science-as-villain and no 'white saviours'.

Submissions should be 1,000-6,000 words, or 250-500 for flash fiction. No simultaneous submissions, but up to two multiple submissions per month is okay – though send each one separately. Payment is currently \$50 per full length story for first world electronic and print publication rights, and non-exclusive anthology and archival rights. It is intended that this flat rate will change to the full professional rate of 8¢ per word before



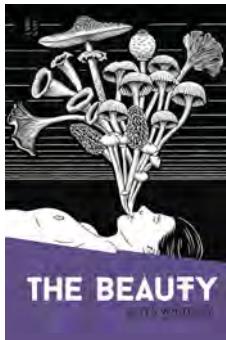
publication begins.

*Black Girls Are Magic* will publish at least one story per issue by a new author – the title may publish more, or indeed, an entire issue may be filled with stories by new writers. Read the full guidelines and submit at [www.blackgirlmagicmag.com](http://www.blackgirlmagicmag.com)

## UK FICTION MARKET

### *A song well unsung*

BY TINA JACKSON



Unsung Stories is an imprint of London-based small press Red Squirrel Publishing. It publishes intelligent and distinctive genre fiction – science fiction, fantasy, horror, speculative, post-apocalyptic works that push the boundaries of these genres.

'We're after the projects of passion, the shining ambitious ideas that demand to be written,' said Unsung Stories' George Sandison. 'A science fantasy, hardboiled noir, epic poem, for instance. What we want are the compelling and unique ideas that writers might feel is their best work, but that they have trouble placing with bigger presses on established lists. Because the truth is there's so much talent and so many incredible books being passed over. This is where Unsung come in – we're only interested in publishing the best stories, and the best-looking books we can. And with four award shortlistings already, hopefully we're on the right track.'

Since setting up last year, Unsung titles have been shortlisted for the Shirley Jackson Award, the James Tiptree Jr Award, the Saboteur Awards and the Not the Booker prize at the *Guardian*. Unsung also runs genre-only live lit nights in London.

George is not prescriptive about Unsung's next move. 'We don't fix a number of titles for next year because it entirely depends on what is submitted,' he explained. 'In fact, we are very selective because we want to ensure that each story is genuinely special, something we think is award-worthy. That's meant three books in the first year, but we are getting submissions all the time so it could be more as well.'

Unsung likes ambitious, unexpected, thought-provoking books with well-wrought, possibly under-represented characters. 'We refer to it as, "that rare combination of style, concept, plotting and that alchemical extra something that no one has found an appropriate name for yet",' said George. 'It's that tension between a great idea, compelling and well-realised characters, astute, deft world-building, sharp writing and the as-yet undefined spark that gives something life.' But the most important aspects of the books George is looking for are: 'Distinctive, compelling and beautiful stories. You know, the kind that make you hector your friends for weeks until they finally cave and read it, only to come back the next day not having slept, whispering about how good that book was.'

Unsung Stories will consider anything complete as long as it's speculative/genre fiction: 'Novels, collections, short stories, novellas, the lot.' Submissions of collections should be a minimum 50,000 words. Send the first 15,000 words as a Word document (no pdfs) with a synopsis and an introductory email.

Unsung Stories also accepts submissions of original, unpublished short fiction of up to 3,000 words for publication on the website. A new story is published every two weeks.

Unsung Stories pays £25 for short stories and royalties for book-length fiction.

All submissions should be uploaded via the online submission system: [www.unsungstories.co.uk/submit](http://www.unsungstories.co.uk/submit); short story submissions: [www.unsungstories.co.uk/short-fiction](http://www.unsungstories.co.uk/short-fiction); Website: [www.unsungstories.co.uk](http://www.unsungstories.co.uk)



## Commemorating Causley



Open to all, including non-UK poets, the annual Charles Causley Poetry Competition offers a £2,000 first prize, £250 for second and £100 for third, with five £30 highly commended, for original poems of a maximum forty lines, on any subject.

Send entries on single sides of A4. There is no limit to the number of entries; entry fee is £7, £5 each subsequent.

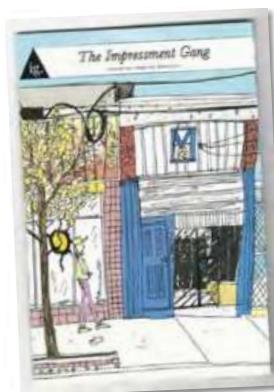
As judging will be anonymous include only a line count and title at the top of your poem. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry form, available from the website, and this should include your details.

No entry should have been previously published, including web or self-publication, have been broadcast in any form, won a prize in any competition or be entered in any other competition before the closing date of this competition. Submit three hard copies of each poem.

The closing date is 3 November, and winners will be notified on Christmas Day. The winner will be eligible for an additional budget to attend the awards ceremony in 2016.

**Details:** Charles Causley Poetry Competition, Launceston Tourist Information Office, White Hart Arcade, Broad Street, Launceston, Cornwall PL15 8AA; website: <https://thecharlescausleytrust.wordpress.com/>

## Make it with Impression



*The Impression Gang* is a non-profit literary magazine from Halifax, Nova Scotia. It is a new magazine only three issues old so far, but a quality read. It publishes online and in print three times a year. The guidelines are clear. This team wants quality, in poetry, fiction, non-fiction and reviews. It focuses on Canadian writing and reviews, but submissions are open internationally.

Submit only unpublished, original work. Send no more than six poems, but there is no word limit for fiction, non-fiction and 'other writing'. The editors simply want writing which 'really should knock our socks off'. Multiple submissions and simultaneous submissions are accepted but keep them informed. Note that if work is accepted the writer should expect editorial suggestions.

Submit work as two separate pdf files. Include a cover letter with full contact details, 'email, title(s) of work, word count, and brief bio.' Make sure all work is paginated, in a 12pt readable font. Don't forget to 'indicate in the body of your email whether you would like to opt IN or OUT of our newsletter.'

Response time is 'within four months of submitting', Payment is Can\$25 and two copies. 'We are working hard to increase this drastically.' Right obtained are first North American serial rights FNASR and electronic publishing rights in the English language, non-exclusive, plus archival rights.

**Details:** email: [submissions@theimpressiongang.ca](mailto:submissions@theimpressiongang.ca); website: [www.theimpressiongang.com](http://www.theimpressiongang.com)

## FLASHES

Kate French is the new editor of *Smallish* upmarket monthly parenting magazine. Articles on childcare, development, health, education and lifestyle are invited, but submit ideas first. Payment can be arranged. **Details:** Exclusive Magazines, Media House, 5 Broadway Court, Chesham, Bucks HP5 1EG; tel: 01494 771744; email: [elee@exclusivemagazines.co.uk](mailto:elee@exclusivemagazines.co.uk)

Northern Ireland journalist Rodney Edwards, of *The Impartial Reporter*, has written book, *Sure, why would ye not?* (Blackstaff Press), inspired by his weekly Fermanagh Spake column for the local newspaper 'which celebrates the idiosyncrasies, humour and uniqueness of Irish turns of phrase', Holdthefrontpage website reported.

*The Times Educational Supplement* and the National Association for the Teaching of English ran a survey to find teachers' top 100 fiction books all children should read before leaving primary school. The top three, in order, were *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Roald Dahl; *Goodnight Mister Tom*, Michelle Magorian; *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll.

'It has been my nightmare that Tolkien would turn out to be the most influential writer of the 20th century. The bad dream has materialised.' **Germaine Greer**

## GLOBAL SPECIFIC MARKET

### Enter the Elephant

BY GARY DALKIN



*See The Elephant* is a new US based e-zine published by Metaphysical Circus Press. Editor Melanie Lamaga is interested in fiction with a metaphysical slant by both new and established writers; issue one features Elizabeth Hand and Nisi Shawl. Submissions may range from the fantastic, the science-fictional, through magical realism, the weird, slipstream, fabulist, metaphysical, psychological to supernatural horror. To get a flavour for the sort of material published you can obtain a free digital copy of Issue 1 by signing up to the email newsletter on the website: [www.metaphysicalcircus.com](http://www.metaphysicalcircus.com)

**metaphysicalcircus.com**

You must, in any case, first sign up before being considered for publication.

Payment is 6c per word for original material, up to a maximum of \$200; 2¢ per word for reprints in the magazine, maximum \$100; 1¢ per word for web only reprints, maximum \$50. Stories should ideally be 500-6,000 words, though longer works may be considered if they are suitable for serialisation.

No simultaneous or multiple submissions, with the exception that you may submit up to three pieces of flash fiction together as long as all are shorter than 1,000 words. All submissions must be professionally formatted. To begin the submission process create an account on this page: <http://writ.rs/metaphysicalcircussubs> and then follow the instructions.

**Guidelines at:** [www.metaphysicalcircus.com/submissions/short-fiction/](http://www.metaphysicalcircus.com/submissions/short-fiction/); email: [editors@metaphysicalcircus.com](mailto:editors@metaphysicalcircus.com)

## COMPETITION

### Build something healthy

Architects for Health's Phil Gusack Writing Prize 2016 is for essays that explore good design for health.

The award, now in its second year, is a memorial to Phil Gusack, an active and valued member of Architects for Health, who died in 2011.

The winner will receive £500 and their essay will be published in the *RIBA Journal*. Shortlisted entries will be published on the AfH website.

The competition is for original, unpublished essays no longer than 2,000 words that demonstrate how good design for health can, and should, happen.

Essays may be critical, fantastical, take the form of a blog, story, critique or polemic, but should not be a survey, a descriptive process or a building study. Architects are strongly discouraged from writing about their own building projects.

The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. All entries must be submitted digitally, accompanied by a registration form.

The closing date is 5 November. **Website:** <http://writ.rs/philgusackwritingprize>

## Amazon sends Scout worldwide

In October 2014 Amazon launched a US only ebook publishing venture called Kindle Scout. Now the programme has been expanded to the UK, as well as much of mainland Europe, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa.

Kindle Scout is a crowd-sourced publishing system – Amazon calls it 'reader powered' – which lets authors upload manuscripts which, if they receive a reader nomination within thirty days, will be considered for publication by the editorial team at Kindle Press. A final decision will be made within 45 days. English-language books in the following categories are eligible: romance, mystery and thriller, science fiction and fantasy, teen and young adult, general literature and fiction. Submissions must have been professionally copyedited and be at least 50,000 words in length. To date 75 titles have been published as a result of being 'discovered' by Kindle Scout; the latest releases include *There Is A Land* by Ted Oswald and *Euphoria Lane* by Tina Sawyzee McCright.

General manager of Kindle Scout, Dina Hilal, commented, 'Expanding our platform to authors and readers outside the US has been one of the most frequent requests we've received since we launched. With today's announcement, we're eagerly awaiting the great new stories that will come from opening to even more talented writers and Scouts from around the world.'

Authors selected through the Kindle Scout programme receive a \$1,500 advance against a 50% royalty rate on ebook sales with a five-year renewable contract.

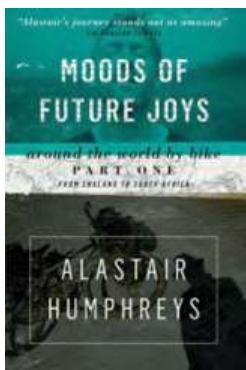
**Website:** <https://kindlescout.amazon.com/about>



# UK NON-FICTION MARKET

## Eyes down for inspirational travel tales

BY TINA JACKSON



The tagline for independent non-fiction publisher Eye Books is 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things', and although many of its titles are travel books, the uniting factor is that they are all about people who took risks to live their dreams.

'I set it up in 1996,' said founder Dan Hiscocks. 'I was lucky enough to be in the parade in Cape Town when Nelson Mandela was giving his first release speech. He said (paraphrased): "Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate, our greatest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. By shining our own light, we subconsciously give permission for others to shine theirs. Go shine your light."

'I am passionate that travel has transformative powers which allow you to ground yourself and reflect on where you are at in your life. I wanted to find stories about ordinary people, like me who had embraced this – often at a difficult crossroads in their life – and had thrown themselves into a life-changing transformative journey.'

Dan is always happy to hear from writers who have a story that challenges convention and conveys thought-provoking experiences. 'Hopefully people will read our books and be inspired that, as our authors have followed their dreams, the reader can find and follow theirs too,' he said. 'By doing this, they will reflect on what is important to them and consider if they want to do something about it. We live such busy lives that often, people do not get this chance and I feel passionate that we need it.'

The number of titles Eye Books will publish each year is flexible but Dan's ideal is around eight. All prospective writers must register with Eye and submit through the online submission system. Manuscripts should be complete and a maximum of 65,000 words. Writers should include a synopsis, a back cover blurb, a chapter-by-chapter breakdown, a list of characters and if appropriate a map with their submission, as well as marketing information.

Eye Books publishes in all formats and pays royalties.

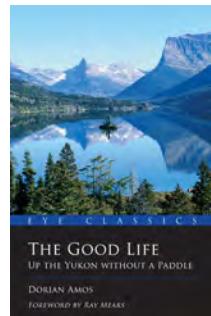
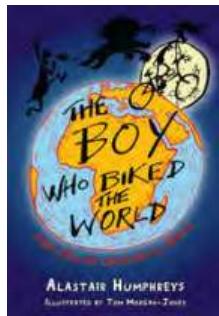
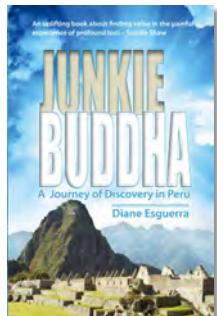
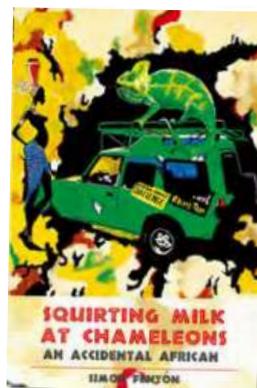
**Details:** email: [dan@eye-books.com](mailto:dan@eye-books.com); website: <http://eye-books.com>

- Dan has now branched out into publishing fiction through a co-publishing initiative, Lightening Books. Authors receive 50% of the profits, but are expected to pay towards publication costs.

'Sharing the risk 50/50 and sharing the reward 50/50 seems like the fair way to do this,' said Dan. 'The author has poured years into getting a manuscript ready to work with a publisher. The publisher has (in my case) spent years and years creating an infrastructure to allow a book to fulfil demand in any format.'

Lightening Books has specific guidelines for fiction writers who wish to submit. Accepted writers make an initial payment of £800.

Website: <http://lightening-books.com>



**C**ontrary to the myth that authors work best in lonely isolation, the truth is that editors or close advisers have often quietly shaped great books. James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* would not be half so entertaining had it not been for the assistance of Shakespeare scholar Edmund Malone. The novelist Edward Bulyer-Lytton advised Charles Dickens to change the ending of *Great Expectations* from one where Pip and Estella definitely don't get together to one in which, in that wonderfully ambiguous final line, Pip sees "no shadow of another parting from her".

"The 20th century brought the rise of the professional, interventionist editor. In 1924, Maxwell Perkins received a manuscript from F Scott Fitzgerald. The author suggested that the title he had chosen – *The Great Gatsby* – might need some work. How about *Trimalchio in West Egg* [Trimalchio is a freedman who attained wealth and power in the Roman fictional work *Satyricon*, by Petronius (who died in AD66)]? Luckily, Perkins and Fitzgerald agreed to keep the original.'

**Sameer Rahim, *The Telegraph***

'Virtually every well-known writer has a story about their work being rejected early on in their careers. "I love my rejection slips. They show me I try," said Sylvia Plath. "Often you have to fail as a writer before you write that bestselling novel or ground-breaking memoir," said JK Rowling. There's also the tradition of writers defiantly wallpapering their bathrooms with "thanks but no thanks" letters (or, these days, emails?).'

**Sally Stott, BBC Writersroom reader**

'Authors are not in a strong position. Publishers are often large multinationals while authors typically work alone. Especially at the start of their careers they may have little or no advice and are thrilled to be offered publishing contracts. Creators frequently need to negotiate with monopolies or with dominant players in highly specialised markets, such as scientific publishers. Individual creators are therefore at an inherent disadvantage when negotiating the terms of their contracts.'

**Nicola Solomon, chief executive, Society of Authors, making a call for immediate action 'to protect creators from onerous contracts.'**

'There is a muse, but he's not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer station. He lives in the ground. He's a basement guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labour, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you.'

**Stephen King, *On Writing, A Memoir of the Craft***

## FLASHES

*International Boat Industry*, a trade publication dealing with the marine and leisure industry nationwide appears eight times a year. Editor Ed Slack is always interested in news items concerning the industry.

**Details:** Time Inc (UK) Ltd, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU; tel: 0203 148 4935; email: ed.slack@timeinc.com

Ana Hine, formerly of Dundee's *Evening Telegraph*, organised a successful crowdfunding exercise to launch her magazine *Artificial Womb*, available in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Hull, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and London.

Suzy Cox, deputy editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, has become the editor of *Heat* magazine.

Goldsmiths College, part of London University, launched a new and 'inventive' academic publisher named *The Goldsmiths Press*, 'driven by a widely documented need for new forms of academic publishing in the digital age'.

'Stories of imagination tend to upset those without one.'

**Terry Pratchett**

## GLOBAL SPIRITUAL MARKET

*Inspirational opportunity*

BY JENNY ROCHE

A spiritual inspirational magazine publishing true stories of people who have attained a goal, surmounted an obstacle or learnt a helpful lesson through their faith, the monthly *Guideposts* magazine, based in the USA, likes to think of itself as a 'trusted partner on your life's journey' and a source of daily inspiration.

Essays, sermons and fiction are not wanted and poetry is rarely used. Full-length stories are what is wanted and these should be first person narratives of around 1,500 words. The story can be about yourself or someone else and should focus on one specific event rather than an entire life story. Include all relevant facts so the reader can understand what took place and ensure you make



the reader feel as though they were there and can feel what the person felt.

'Show the positive and specific change in the narrator that occurs as a result of the experience, a message or insight that readers can apply to their own lives,' say guidelines.

Payment for full-length stories is made on acceptance

For full details see:

[www.guideposts.org/writers-guidelines](http://www.guideposts.org/writers-guidelines)

**Potty about pottery?**

If you enter the *Ceramic Review* Writing Prize you could be the winner of an Emma Bridgewater teapot covered in pretty multi-coloured spots.

The competition is for 650-word pieces inspired by the British Ceramics Biennial: innovative writing that captures the excitement around contemporary ceramics. The winner's work will

appear in a future issue of *Ceramic Review* (and they get the teapot).

All entries must be original, unpublished prose of approximately 650 words. Submit entries by email, either as an attachment or in the email body. The subject line should read '*Ceramic Review* Writing Prize 2015'. Include email address and other contact details in the body of the email.

Entry is free. Writers may submit one entry. The closing date is 16 November.

**Details:** email: [editorial@ceramicreview.com](mailto:editorial@ceramicreview.com); website: [www.ceramicreview.com](http://www.ceramicreview.com)

**The futures of medicine**

Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities, which is based at the University of Glasgow and supported by a Wellcome Trust Seed Grant, is running a creative writing competition for science fiction on the theme of medicine, health and illness.

There is a first prize of £300, and further prizes of £200, £150 and £50. The top three entries and up to seventeen runners-up will be published in an anthology.

Short stories and novel extracts up to 3,000 words are invited that in some way interpret the theme. Possible interpretations might include (but are not limited to): future/alien health, illness, medicine and doctors; computerised/robotic healthcare; utopian/dystopian versions of health, illness and medicine; cosmetic or elective surgery/transplantation/modification; public and population health at global or galactic level; alternative medical history. All entries must be original and unpublished.

Entry is free. No writer may submit more than two entries. All entries should be submitted as double-spaced doc, docx, rtf or pdf files via the online form.

The closing date is 31 January.  
Website: <http://scifimedhums.glasgow.ac.uk/writing-competition/>

**Book Talk BY JOHN JENSEN**

I'm an unashamed lover of detective stories. My home is festooned with boxes of them bought online for £9.99 or so. I've got noir, Christie, of course, Simenon, and masses of volumes dealing with country female 'tecs, gardening 'tecs, teen 'tecs. I'm retired but I'll never be able to finish reading them in my lifetime. My wife called in Fay, a counsellor, to help control my addiction. I soon realised that Fay was also an aficionado. I stopped ordering crates of stuff but we surreptitiously swap novels on each visit. I hope my counselling is long-term.





# INTRODUCTIONS

*Writing Magazine* presents a selection of pet magazines currently accepting contributions. We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with their publications before submitting and check websites, where given, for submission guidelines.



*Your Dog*, edited by Sarah Wright, is Britain's bestselling dog magazine. It is very practical in tone, with features offering useful advice and down-to-earth information on all aspects of canine behaviour, care and training. Sarah accepts

freelance contributions, particularly first-hand, real life-type stories of dog ownership or practical articles on some aspect of canine training, behaviour, health, sporting activities or general care. The maximum feature length is 1,500 words but Sarah is also keen on shorter articles (between 800 and 1,000 words). It is appreciated if prospective writers are able to supply good quality pictures.

Payment varies

**Details:** email: [editorial@yourdog.co.uk](mailto:editorial@yourdog.co.uk); website: [www.yourdog.co.uk](http://www.yourdog.co.uk)



*PetFocus* magazine, edited by Sarah Kidby, is mainly distributed via vet practices, promoting responsible pet care, celebrating the relationship between humans and animals and the role of vets, animal charity workers etc. It largely features pet health

and behaviour articles written by vets and animal behaviourists. Other features include heroic animal stories, dog and cat breed features, articles on wildlife species, pet events, animal charity stories and features on careers with animals. It covers a wide range of animals: dogs, cats, small pets, aquatic pets, bird, reptiles, horses, goats and even stick insects. Sarah is always happy to look at ideas for freelance features, which should be sent by email. Payment varies.

**Details:** email: [editorial@petfocus.co.uk](mailto:editorial@petfocus.co.uk); website: [www.petfocus.co.uk](http://www.petfocus.co.uk)



*REPTILES* magazine caters for reptile and amphibian hobbyists of all levels of experience, from beginner to veteran. The main focus of all its articles is the care, husbandry and breeding of reptiles and amphibians.

Freelance submissions are welcomed from writers with an active herp background (herpetology is the branch of zoology concerned with the study of reptiles and amphibians). Suitable topics for *REPTILES* include husbandry, breeding, field herping, interviews, trends, how-to features and health. Send articles/ideas on spec, *REPTILES* editors may suggest additional content to accompany accepted features. Send articles as Word documents or ideas by email. Payment for accepted features varies.

**Details:** email: [reptiles@i5publishing.com](mailto:reptiles@i5publishing.com); website: [www.reptilesmagazine.com](http://www.reptilesmagazine.com)



*Parrots Magazine*, edited by John Catchpole, caters for responsible parrot owners and exclusively covers parrots and parakeets for a readership that covers the entire social spectrum. Topics take in everything of interest to parrot-fanciers, including general maintenance, diet and nutrition, cages and aviaries, healthcare and conservation. John accepts submissions from readers with expert, in-depth knowledge of parrots who are familiar with the magazine. Images are appreciated but must be high-quality. Approach him by email with ideas. Payment varies.

**Details:** email: [editorial@imaxweb.co.uk](mailto:editorial@imaxweb.co.uk); website: [www.parrotmag.com](http://www.parrotmag.com)



*The Bark* is a US dog magazine with more than 250,000 readers that covers every aspect of life with dogs – it is a lifestyle magazine as well as a pet care publication. Features are literate and entertaining, aimed

at a very well-informed readership, and cover health, food and nutrition, behaviour and training, life with dogs and canine-related culture, including some fiction and poetry and personal accounts. Prospective writers should be familiar with the magazine and its tone and voice. All non-fiction submissions should be journalistic in approach. Personal memoirs are discouraged. 600-word pieces are also accepted on general themes and 'how to' topics. Contributors should not focus on one particular breed of dog.

Payment varies

**Details:** email: [submissions@thebark.com](mailto:submissions@thebark.com); website: <http://thebark.com>



*Animal Wellness* is a natural pet magazine based in Canada that covers holistic animal care from physical to emotional health. Unsolicited feature contributions between 500 and 1,500 words are welcomed from contributors familiar with the magazine as long as they focus on holistic healing in an animal context. Contributions for the Animal Passages, Warm & Fuzzy and Tail End columns are particularly welcomed. Payment varies.

**Details:** email: [ann@redstonemediagroup.com](mailto:ann@redstonemediagroup.com); website: <http://animalwellnessmagazine.com>

## Newcomers only for this comp

The Fiction Desk is inviting entries for its Newcomer prize for short stories.

The competition is only open to writers who have not been published by *The Fiction Desk*, and who have not yet published a novel or collection of short stories on paper.

The competition, which is for literary and

crossover genre fiction, has a first prize of £500 and a second prize of £250.

Entries should be original, unpublished short fiction between 1,000 and 7,000 words. All stories should be submitted through the online submission system as a word doc or docx, double-spaced on A4 in 12pt Times

New Roman. The document should contain the writer's name, story title and email address in the header.

There is an entry fee of £8 per story, which may be paid by credit or debit card or PayPal.

The closing date is 6 November.

**Website:** [www.thefictiondesk.com](http://www.thefictiondesk.com)

## FLASHES

Dave Briginshaw is editor of *International Railway Journal*, a monthly publication for chief officers of world railways. He accepts features on relevant projects, developments, and finance. Payment is £120 for 1,000 words. **Details:** Simmons-Boardman Aubushe Corporation, 40 Killigrew Street, Falmouth, Cornwall TR1 3PP; tel: 01326 313945; email: irj@railjournal.co.uk

Scotland's literary scene received a boost with the launch of the first dedicated online collection of Scottish books, *The Scotsman* newspaper reported. 'Books from Scotland' contains nearly 7,000 Scottish titles.

Boris Johnson has struck a £500,000 deal for a biography of William Shakespeare which publisher Hodder, hopes to bring out next year, the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death.

Tom Wright, formerly chief reporter, the *Weston, Worle & Somerset Mercury*, is the new editor of the *North Somerset Times*.

The Canadian science fiction magazine *ON SPEC* will be suspending the print magazine and going digital only. Details at: <https://onspecmag.wordpress.com/2015/08/13/canada-council-update/>

'I'm not interested in a book that is going to generate less than \$100,000 in revenue unless the editor or publisher has a compelling vision for the book and/or the author.'

**Brad Martin, the head of Penguin Random House Canada.**

## GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

*Fulfil your dreams*

## PDR LINDSAY-SALMON



Dreaming Big Publications is a small press with a conscience and a wish to help disadvantaged sections of society. Editor in chief Kristi King-Morgan, is establishing the company as a book publisher 'to promote mental health education for all and creative writing in youth.' She needs short stories for several anthologies and the magazine and she is open to novel

submissions. Children and young adults are welcome to submit work for the magazine and website. The only requirement is good writing.

Currently anthology short stories, 3,000 to 10,000 words, are wanted for a horror anthology. Send stories which will horrify, shock and make the reader scared to turn out the light, or disgust them 'with the

depravity of human nature'. Psychological thrillers are highly favoured, but SF or paranormal horror stories are not wanted.

There are also three linked anthologies, also needing 3,000-10,000 words of science fiction, fantasy or paranormal stories.

The final anthology is a *Write To The Prompt* anthology. The editor has collected a list of sayings which she will give to participant writers. A story outline should be created from one phrase or sentence. Send your idea as a query and wait for an acceptance or suggestions.

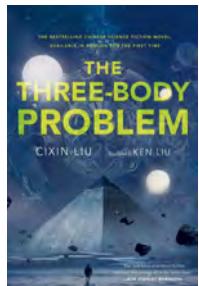
Submit online using the contact form. Copy and paste short pieces in the body of the contact form. Longer work should be preceded by a query sent using the contact form.

Include a brief bio and 'a description of what motivated or inspired you to write your work,' as well as links to an author's website and social media, 'other books, or anything else you want published with your writing.' Include all these in one submission to avoid confusion.

Response time is 'reasonable'. Payment 'will be negotiated on an individual basis' for one-year exclusive publishing rights.

**Website:** [www.dreamingbigpublications.com](http://www.dreamingbigpublications.com)

## No joy for Sad Puppies



As previously reported, science fiction's most prestigious awards, the Hugos, given annually at the World Science Fiction Convention, and voted on by attending and supporting members of that convention, were beset by controversy this year. This follows a move by two groupings of disaffected writers, the Sad Puppies and the Rabid Puppies, to encourage their followers to vote en masse for a 'slate' of authors and titles

purporting to represent what the genre should be.

At the 73rd WorldCon, held this year in Spokane, Washington, the Puppy agenda was roundly rejected, with the majority of voting fans choosing to vote 'no award' in the categories largely or entirely filled with nominations from one or other of the Puppy 'voting slates'. Overall 'no award' received the most votes in five categories, equalling the previous total 'no award' votes in the entire 63-year history of the Hugos. In the end no awards were presented in the following categories: novella, story, related work, editor (short form) and editor (long form).

One other result of the reaction against the attempted manipulation of the Hugos was that for the first time the best novel and best novelette prizes went to works in translation; *The Three Body Problem* by Chinese author Cixin Liu (translated by Ken Liu, published by Tor) and *The Day the World Turned Upside Down* by Thomas Olde Heuvelt (translated by Lia Belt, published in *Lightspeed*). Other Hugos were given for: best graphic story, *Ms Marvel Volume 1: No Normal*, written by G Willow Wilson, illustrated by Adrian Alphona and Jake Wyatt, (Marvel Comics); best dramatic presentation, long form, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, written by James Gunn and Nicole Perlman; best dramatic presentation, short form, *Orphan Black*, (for an episode written by Graeme Manson). The John W Campbell Award for best new writer was given to Wesley Chu.

## NZ award winner attracts unwanted attention



The 2012 New Zealand Post Children's Book Award winner, *Into The River* by Ted Dawe, has become the first book to be banned in New Zealand since *How to Build a Bazooka* fell foul of the law in 1993. The interim ban is the New Zealand Film and Literature Board of Review's response to a complaint by conservative pressure group, Family First. As a result the YA novel has been withdrawn from sale and removed from libraries. Under New Zealand law an individual without knowledge of the ban can still be fined \$3,000 for distributing the book, while a bookshop selling the title while unaware of the ban faces a \$10,000 fine. An individual who knows about the ban and sells the book can be fined \$10,000, or go to prison for up to three months, and a shop selling the book with knowledge of the ban can be fined \$25,000.

Ironically Family First never asked for *Into The River* to be banned, but requested that an R-14 age restriction rating, which had been removed by New Zealand's deputy chief censor, Nic McCullum, be reinstated. This was because, according to Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ, the novel includes 'strong offensive language, strong sexual descriptions' and addresses subject matter including 'paedophilia and sexual abuse'.

Rather than restore the age restrictive rating the Board of Review issued a temporary ban until the matter is resolved at a meeting in October.

## UK LITERARY MARKET

### *Small and perfectly formed*

BY TINA JACKSON

CB Editions is a small but prize-winning publishing house that exists to publish books whose idiosyncrasy means they may get overlooked by bigger publishers.

'I publish the kind of books I'd like to read, just as I think many writers write the kind of books they'd like to read but which aren't yet on the shelves,' says publisher Charles Boyle. 'Most of the books on the CBe list are either poetry or fiction, including short stories, and most of them are short (nothing over around 60,000 words, and usually much fewer). Some of the books are a mix of fiction and non-fiction, and cause booksellers to scratch their heads when deciding where to place them.'

CB Edition's history is as individual as its output. Charles worked for around 25 years in mainstream publishing (including fourteen years at Faber) before going freelance in 2005. 'In 2007 I inherited £2,000 from an uncle who had died, and I went to see a local printer and discovered that for that money I could have 1,000 books printed and bound, so that's what I did – four titles in print runs of 250 each. I paid around £100 for a single-page website and three months after talking with the printer I collected the boxes of books. I had no distributor, no business plan, not even any intention to publish any more titles – but I found I was enjoying this, and one of the books won a prize (McKitterick, for best novel by a writer over 40, and was bought by Bloomsbury), so I did another four titles the next year, and then the next... Very quickly, I had become addicted.'

CB Editions is sustainable, financially, only because it has no overheads. 'I wear various different hats – design, typesetting, publicity, accounting, etc – but basically it's just me, sitting at the desk in my living room,' said Charles. 'This is how I like it – I'm useless at delegating – but of course there are only so many new titles that this arrangement can deliver. In recent years I've

published five or six titles a year; one year I did nine, but never again.'

Charles is not prescriptive about what is submitted to him. 'First of all, I'm looking to be surprised. All my favourite books have this in common: they

show that you don't have to do it like that, like all those other books, you can do it like this. Surprise isn't the same thing as shock; it can be quiet and slow and subtle. For me, it's delivered first at the level of individual sentences or lines – and if those don't hook me, I'm not going to care anything for plot or characterisation, etc.' He hasn't got, and doesn't see the need for, any submission guidelines. 'If writers want to send me their writing, they will, and it's not for me to tell them how. Email attachments, hard copy, bits of books or whole books – their choice.'

Last year CBe titles were shortlisted for the *Guardian* First Book Award and the Goldsmiths Prize and won the Scott Moncrieff translation prize. 'To date, every first poetry collection I've published has won the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and been shortlisted for a Forward prize. These things – especially for an outfit that has no marketing or publicity resources or expertise – help to get the books known about, and they do help sales, but the sales potential of a book plays almost no part in my thinking about whether or not to take it on. Some titles have sold fewer than 100 copies; I'm no less proud to have published those than the ones that have sold over 1,000.'

All CBe books are published in paperback editions with endsheets, and most of them have brown card covers with a typographic cover design.

Charles pays a small advance and royalties. 'No one is getting rich here, he says. 'For the twice-yearly magazine, *Sonofabook*, which CBe started this year, I pay £100 per contribution, but that is possible only because the magazine has some start-up Arts Council funding.'

Details: email: [info@cbeditions.com](mailto:info@cbeditions.com); website: [www.cbeditions.com](http://www.cbeditions.com)



## NZ home for experimental SF

*Capricious* is a new magazine based in New Zealand seeking 'literary and experimental speculative fiction, and related non-fiction'. Submissions are open and the editors are looking for writing from New Zealand and around the world. Financial support from SpecFicNZ means the editors can support new local writers as well as established writers.

*Capricious* editors 'err towards the literary/experimental/slipstream side of speculative fiction' but that does not mean plotless waffle. They 'appreciate a strong plot and kickass characters as much as anyone'. Second person, unusual tenses and less common language choices are all welcome. Fiction which 'explores the relationship between an environment and its inhabitants is particularly welcome'.

Submit stories, 3,000-5,000 words, but no flash fiction or novel extracts, as a doc, docx or rtf file.

Cover letters are optional but a writer's CV or a link to the writer's website 'would be appreciated'. Submit through the website

Non-fiction (essays and articles of 3,000-5,000 words), is also welcome. The editors currently seek 'in-depth discussions of a theme across a number of works of fiction,' or the 'explorations of the work of under-recognised marginalised authors'. The only personal non-fiction acceptable would be 'well-crafted personal essays on the relationship between the essay author's experiences and a work or works of speculative fiction.' Formatting and submission details are the same as for fiction submissions.

Response times vary between 'one day and three weeks'. Payment is a flat \$50 for the 'usual rights'.

Website: [www.capricioussf.org](http://www.capricioussf.org)

## \$10,000 prize for first crime novel

Minotaur Books, in association with the Mystery Writers of America have announced their 2016 First Crime Novel Competition. The competition is open to any writer, of any nationality, aged eighteen or older, writing in English, who has never previously had a novel, in any genre, published. The 2015 competition was won by first-time novelist John Keyse-Walker for *The Drowned Land*, who received \$10,000 and publication by Minotaur, an imprint of Macmillan US.

Entry is free and you may only enter once. All entries must be previously unpublished crime fiction, no less than 65,000 words long. The deadline is 11.59pm EST on 14 December. All entries must be submitted as doc, docx or as a pdf file. Save your file "Manuscript Title\_Entrant Name" and submit via the form at: <http://us.macmillan.com/minotaurobooks/submit-manuscript>

The winner will be notified no later than the end of March, 2016, and, subject to contract, will receive an advance of \$10,000 against future royalties and be officially recognised at the Edgar Awards Banquet in New York City in April 2016. Essential to follow the full guidelines at: <http://us.macmillan.com/minotaurobooks/writing-competitions> Send any enquires to [MB-MWAFirstCrimeNovelCompetition@StMartins.com](mailto:MB-MWAFirstCrimeNovelCompetition@StMartins.com)

**FLASHES**

John Burton is chairman of The George Eliot Fellowship, which aims to promote interest in the author's life and works. It produces annual journal *The George Eliot Review* and awards the annual £500 George Eliot Fellowship Prize for an essay up to 4,000 words on the author's life and work.

**Details:** Chairman, 39 Lower Road, Barnacle, Coventry CV7 9LD; tel: 0247 661 9126

The Crime Writers' Association launched Dagger Reads, an online literary initiative that promotes shortlisted titles for the Dagger Awards. Entries for the 2016 Daggers are being accepted. ([www.daggerreads.co.uk](http://www.daggerreads.co.uk))

*Alpha Man* is a new digital-only fitness title, launched by Jon Lipsey and Joe Warner, former editor of *Men's Fitness*. It is available as a free app for tablets and mobiles.

**Email:** editorial@alphamanmag.com

The annual Terry O'Neill Award for Photojournalism is being reviewed and updated. There will be no 2015 award but it will relaunch in 2016.

*Back Street Heroes* monthly magazine for custom bike enthusiasts is now owned by Morton's Media Group.

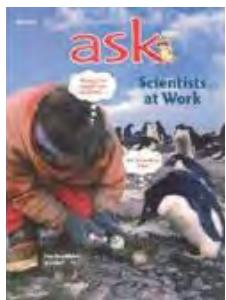
**Details:** Media Centre, Morton Way, Horncastle LN9 61R

'If you can't annoy somebody with what you write, I think there's little point in writing.'

**Kingsley Amis**

**GLOBAL CHILDREN'S MARKET***For curious children*

BY JENNY ROCHE



For children between the ages of seven and ten who are curious about science and the world they live in, Chicago-based *ASK* magazine aims to introduce them to the 'joys of thinking, writing and observing scientifically' and 'presumes them to be active participants in the ongoing search for better knowledge about the world'. To this end non-fiction articles are sought on topics that are appealing and accessible to children of this age, whilst also being of interest to adults.

Themes and possible topics for 2016 have already been decided and for the September issue with a queries deadline of 15 December 2015 the main theme is 'Brains' with the general direction of: why do we have brains and how do they work? Possible topics might include mapping the brain, how thoughts happen, exercising your brain, distributed intelligence, learning to see by clicks and how the brain makes colour.

You are encouraged to stretch the boundaries of the themes and find interesting perspectives and unexpected connections. Articles should not read like a school textbook or encyclopaedia and should tell a good story with an emphasis on ideas, not just facts.

The usual length of articles is 1,200-1,600 words with sidebars. Occasionally commissioned are photo essays of 400-600 words, humour pieces of 200-400 words and 200-400 word profiles of people, inventions, events or the arts.

If you have an idea for an article submit a query through the Submittable link on the website or pitch an idea by email. Give an overview of your idea to include scope and treatment, resources and a draft opening paragraph. Writers new to the magazine should include a CV and two writing samples to include at least 200 words of unedited copy on any non fiction topic.

Check with the magazine's author's blog for the current edition status, needs and updates: <http://askauthorpage.blogspot.com>

Email pitches to: [ask@cricketmedia.com](mailto:ask@cricketmedia.com)  
Website: [www.cricketmag.com](http://www.cricketmag.com)

**Beat Burgess**

In honour of the noted literary journalist, novelist, poet, playwright and musical composer the fourth Anthony Burgess Prize for Arts Journalism invites reviews of a book, film, concert, ballet, stage play, exhibition or TV show. There is a prize of £2,000 awaiting the winner plus publication in the *Observer* newspaper.

Entries must be original, written in English and word-processed. The maximum word count is 1,500 to include the title. Work which has been previously broadcast, published in print or online on a website, blog or social media site is not eligible and you should not submit your entry to any of these media before 15 February 2016.

Judges for the competition are Kate Mosse, Alexandra Harris, Ruth Scurr and Robert McCrum from the *Observer* newspaper and Will Carr from the International Anthony Burgess Foundation. They will be looking for reviews suitable for publication in the *Observer* that express 'the kind of crackling, exuberant, erudite, witty and imaginative writing that characterised Burgess's work'. They will also be looking for innovative approaches and writing from outside the mainstream. Emerging talent is particularly encouraged and if you have never been published by a major media organisation, your entry will be especially welcome.

There is an entry fee of £10 per entry and the closing date for

**The winning writer in the village!**

The Writers Village International Short Fiction Award winter 2015 is open for entries. The prize, which is for short stories up to 3,000 words, has a first prize of £1,000, a second prize of £500 and a third prize of £250. A further five shortlisted contestants will each be awarded £50, and ten further highly commended writers will have their stories acknowledged online and receive free entry to the next competition. All entries will receive feedback.

Entries should be original, unpublished short stories up to 3,000 words. Stories may be in any genre of fiction, but must clearly be short stories, ie not playscripts, non-fiction or poetry.

Entries may be doc, docx, rtf, pdf or odt files and should be formatted in 11 or 12pt Times New Roman or similar. Single spacing is acceptable. Include a front page with details of address, telephone number and email address. If submitting by email, the file name should be the story title and the subject line should read Writers Village: winter 2015 entry (your name).

There is an entry fee of £15 per story, which may be paid by PayPal, credit card or cheques made out to Village Guild.

The closing date is 30 November.

**Details:** Village Guild, 56 Kestrel Way, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 0GH; email: [cwriting@btinternet.com](mailto:cwriting@btinternet.com); website: [www.writers-village.org](http://www.writers-village.org)

submissions is 30 November. Shortlisted entries will be invited to a prize giving ceremony in London in February 2016 where the winner will be announced.

Enter online or by post.

**Details:** *Observer*/Anthony Burgess Prize for Arts Journalism, International Anthony Burgess Foundation, Engine House, 3 Cambridge Street, Manchester M1 5BY; website: [www.anthonyburgess.org/about-the-foundation/observer-competition](http://www.anthonyburgess.org/about-the-foundation/observer-competition)





# INTERNATIONAL ZINE SCENE

*Farstrider Magazine* will publish its first issue in January 2016. Dedicated to publishing short fantasy stories 'meant to read in one sitting' the zine's definition of fantasy includes sword and sorcery, steampunk, urban fantasy, supernatural horror, et al. Stories should display a range of diversity equal to the magazine's readers.

Submit original fantasy short stories, 1,000-4,000 words. No reprints, multiple or sim subs. Response time is within fourteen days. Payment is 3¢ per word for 'the rights to publish your story on our website first and exclusively for six months'.

**Details:** email: [submissions@farstridermag.com](mailto:submissions@farstridermag.com); website: [www.farstridermag.com](http://www.farstridermag.com)

*A Iteration* is a grassroots literary magazine founded by a handful of bloggers. Started to spotlight the 'dynamic and diverse community of writers and artists on Tumblr' the group used ISSU to produce their print version. Fiction and poetry are welcome but there are cut-off dates for each issue. There is a form for each genre at the website. Submit, as a doc file: up to three poems, 120 lines max total; prose, up to 7,000 words; three flash fiction pieces, under 1,000 words.

**Website:** <http://aliteration.org>

*Whale Road Review* is another new zine with its first issue out in December. The editor wants shorter writings in the forms of poetry, flash fiction, and micro essays which 'don't demand too much time up front, but somehow leave readers changed'.

Submit: poetry, between three and five poems in one attachment; short prose, flash fiction, micro essays, and prose poems under 500 words, up to three pieces in one attachment.

Also wanted are 'Pedagogy Papers', short essays about creative writing for use by teachers. In 500 words or fewer the piece should explain and illustrate some 'exercise,

'prompt, assignment, workshop technique, group activity, or other clever thing' used for teaching creative writing.

All submissions should be in doc, docx or rtf format and need a covering letter and brief (50-word) third-person bio in the body of the email.

**Details:** email: [whaleroadreview@gmail.com](mailto:whaleroadreview@gmail.com); website: [www.whaleroadreview.com](http://www.whaleroadreview.com)

Promising its first annual issue in print and digital in January 2016, *THAT Literary Review* is published by the Creative Writing Programme at Auburn University, Alabama.

The editorial team of staff and students needs fiction, 100-5,000 words. Writing should be surprising and engaging, with 'compelling characters, lively but minimal dialogue, and plots charting the unexpected'. Poetry, up to three poems, should be 'alive and idiosyncratic'. Avoid rhyming, conventional forms, and love poetry.

Response time is three months.  
Submit through the website:  
[www.thatliteraryreview.com](http://www.thatliteraryreview.com)

*Spelk* is a young website/zine, publishing flash fiction. Based in the UK but accepting work from writers anywhere, the site publishes three stories of up to 500 words a week, and any genre will be considered.

Submit a doc by email and include a brief bio with links to social media and a website. Submissions periods are mentioned at the website. Response time is 'within a week.'

**Details:** Editor, Gary Duncan; email: [spelkfiction@gmx.com](mailto:spelkfiction@gmx.com); website: <http://spelkfiction.com>

*Abstract Jam* is a brand new UK zine. Although non-genre specific it leans towards edgy, thought-provoking work. Give them 'a bit of twisted humour, well developed crime or punchy horror/sci-fi/fantasy'.

Submissions of poetry and fiction are welcome. Submit through the website in doc or rtf format. Poetry should have a bite, whether structured or free verse, rhyming or non. The limit is fifty lines, and no haiku or tanka. Response time is 'within four weeks.'

**Details:** email: [submit@abstractjam.com](mailto:submit@abstractjam.com); website: [www.abstractjam.com](http://www.abstractjam.com)

*HeartWood* is another MFA programme online zine, this time from West Virginia Wesleyan College in the USA, to be published biannually, in April and October. The first issue is due in April 2016 and needs poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction.

Submit fiction, nonfiction or creative non-fiction under 3,000 words. Short stories, flash fiction, or novel excerpts are also welcome. Poetry, between three and five poems, may be 'lyric, narrative, experimental, prose poems... all variations of the poetic voice'.

Response time is three months.  
Submit through the website:  
[www.heartwoodlitmag.com](http://www.heartwoodlitmag.com)

A five-year-old zine always in need of daily fiction and poetry, *CommuterLit.com* is designed for readers to enjoy as they commute. Each weekday a new piece of writing is posted and the story, poetry, or novel extract might be literary fiction, SF, fantasy, horror, mystery, thriller, romance and any combinations.

There is a daily Twitter feed and a weekly email newsletter to keep readers up to date and amused.

The *CommuterLit.com* team seeks 'short stories, memoir, novel excerpts and poetry (one poem or a series of poems)', which may be any genre. Stories, preferred length 500-4,000 words, must hook the reader from the first line and keep them reading to the end. Response time is two to three months. Submit a doc or rtf file online through the website: <http://commuterlit.com>

## GLOBAL MYSTERY MARKET

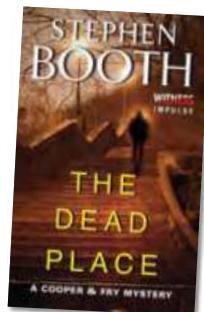
### Creative Impulse

BY GARY DALKIN

Witness Impulse, a William Morrow / HarperCollins digital-first imprint, is currently accepting submissions of mystery fiction. Works from 10,000-word novellas up to full-length novels, which can be 75,000 words or more, are required. Current authors signed to Witness Impulse include the Barry Award-winning novelist Stephen Booth and the Gold and Silver Crime Writers' Association Daggers winner,

Frances Fyfield. Yet despite such high profile authors the imprint is always searching for the next breakout name in crime and mystery fiction. Find out more at <http://wmmorrow.hc.com/witnessimpulse> then submit your novel via the form, in pdf, doc, docx, txt or rtf format, with a covering letter, 3,000 character synopsis and the best or first scene, up to 1,000 words.

Payment is royalty based, and is paid monthly at a rate of 25% for the first 10,000 copies sold, rising then to 50%. The imprint estimates that 'the average number of books sold for all Impulse titles on sale for at least six months is about 15,000.'



**FLASHES**

*Stand Magazine* is a quarterly literary magazine edited by Jon Glover. He welcomes short stories, poetry, translations and literary criticism with payment at £20 per 1,000 words (prose) and £20 per poem.

**Details:** *Stand Magazine*, School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9FT; tel: 0113 233 4794; email: stand@leeds.ac.uk

*OMG* real-life weekly, which launched earlier this year, no longer exists. The owners have merged with *Love It!*, first launched in 2006. The new editor is Paul Carter and it is now produced by the former *OMG* team.

**Details:** ACH Publishing, Lancastrian Office Centre, 3rd Floor, Maclarens House, Talbot Road, Manchester M32 0FP; tel: 0161 381 0161; email: editor@loveitmagazine.co.uk

In a global poll marking what would have been Agatha Christie's 125th birthday, more than 15,000 readers voted for the favourite novel, with *And Then There Were None* the most popular. *Murder on the Orient Express* came second, and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* third.

'You can always edit a bad page. You can't edit a blank page.'

**Jodi Picoult**

**GLOBAL CRIME MARKET***Get into Dark Passages*

BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON

Dark Passages Publishing is a New York-based imprint which endeavours to publish the best new crime novellas in ebook and POD. The imprint needs 'strong voices' and novellas which 'exceed expectations and surprise the reader in both context and form.' The editors like 'mystery, noir, hardboiled, psychological, thriller, pulp, or literary crime' but want short works which: 'Give us something nebulous, something gritty, something radical.' They seek 'compelling stories with intriguing characters and quality writing.' The story should unsettle the reader and thrill them with the use of language and unexpected twists.

Novellas, 15,000-35,000 words, should be original, unpublished work. No reprints, multiple or sim submissions. Submit the entire manuscript as a pdf in a standard publishing format, by email. Include a word count and paginate the manuscript. The manuscript and cover letter must not include any personal or biographical information.

Response time is 'within 4-8 weeks of receipt'. Payment is discussed under contract but is in the form of royalties.

**Details:** email: [darkpassagespublishing@gmail.com](mailto:darkpassagespublishing@gmail.com); website: <http://darkpassagespublishing.com>

**Funding for Welsh writers**

Literature Wales is accepting applications for its 2016 Writers' Bursaries.



There are three categories: new/emerging writer's bursary, published writer's bursary and support fund bursary.

- Applicants for new/emerging writers' and published writers' bursaries should apply for a fixed-sum bursary (£1,000, £2,000, £3,000, £4,000, £5,000, £6,000, £7,000, £8,000, £9,000, £10,000) and demonstrate why the particular sum is needed to support the work in progress.

- New/emerging writers' bursaries are for writers who have not previously have published a volume. Submit at least 10,000 words of the work in progress or fifteen poems. If work has been published in magazines and anthologies, include selected samples.

- Published writers' bursaries are for writers who have already published at least one volume. Submit 4,000 words or ten poems (10,000 words if working in a genre new to the writer) and include a copy of one published volume.

- Support fund bursaries are awarded to assist writers with mobility problems or disabilities who require specialist assistance or equipment to help them research and write their work in progress. Applicants may apply for £1,000 or £2,000, and may also apply for the other two bursaries if applicable.

Eligible genres for all bursaries are novels, short stories, poetry, graphic novels, literary criticism, biography/autobiography, creative non-fiction, children's fiction and young adult fiction. Applications may be made by writers working in language who are resident in Wales throughout the year. Download application forms from the website. The closing date is 23 October.

**Website:** <http://writ.rs/writersbursaries>

**Rhyme online**

Earlyworks Press Web Poetry Competition has a £100 first prize plus £25 for a runner up and £5 for any entries making their way onto the website. The best entries will be published, initially online, and could also be included in a forthcoming paperback anthology.

Poems should be no more than 40 lines long. The entry fee is £3 per poem or £15 for up to six. The closing date is 31 October.

By post, type/print your entry on single sides of A4 paper headed by the title, and include a cover sheet marked EP2015 with the title/s of your poem/s and your name, address and email address.

If submitting by email your contact details and PayPal transaction number should be at the top of the email and your poem/s then pasted into the body of the email below.

**Details:** Earlyworks Press, Creative Media Centre, 45 Robertson Street, Hastings, Sussex TN34 1HL; email to: [services@earlyworkspress.co.uk](mailto:services@earlyworkspress.co.uk); website: [www.earlyworkspress.co.uk](http://www.earlyworkspress.co.uk)

**Darling short stories for HE Bates comp**

Northampton Writers group is inviting entries for its HE Bates Short Story Competition. It is the tenth anniversary of the competition, which is inspired by the famous Northamptonshire author of *The Darling Buds of May*, who wrote many short stories.

The competition is for short stories, on any subject, up to 2,000 words. The prizes have been increased this year, with a first prize of £500, a second prize of £100 and a third prize of £50. There is a further £50 prize for the best short story by a Northamptonshire writer, which will be awarded if that author has not won first, second or third prize.

All entries must be original and unpublished. To enter, send stories by post or email as Word documents, including a first page detailing name, address, telephone number, email address and story title/s. There is an entry fee of £6 per story, which may be paid by cheques made out to Nick Hamlyn, or by PayPal.

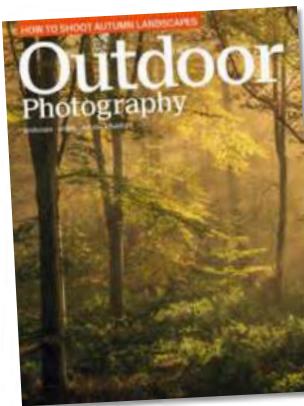
The closing date is 30 November.

**Details:** FAO Nick Hamlyn, HE Bates Competition, 19 Kingswell Road, Kingsthorpe, Northampton NN2 6QB; email: [hebatescomp@gmail.com](mailto:hebatescomp@gmail.com); website: [www.hebatescompetition.org.uk](http://hebatescompetition.org.uk)

# UK MAGAZINE MARKET

## What a wonderful world

TINA JACKSON



*Outdoor Photography* is the UK's only photography magazine for photographers who are passionate about being out in wild places, seeing inspiring nature and having great adventures. 'And, of course, these activities also go hand in hand with an interest in conservation and the environment,' said editor Steve Watkins.

Each issue features a stunning array of photographs with regular contributions by leading photographers from the UK and beyond. 'The magazine is renowned for its informed and in-depth technique features, insightful opinion articles and

its superb guides to photographic locations around the UK,' said Steve. 'We want to create deep content that looks into the minds and the lifestyles of our readers, rather than skimming briefly over subjects.'

Readers of *Outdoor Photography* are engaged and active photographers. 'They tend to be advanced amateurs and semi-professional photographers, along with some professionals too.'

The four main genres of photography that *Outdoor Photography* covers are landscape, wildlife, nature and adventure. 'We feature both traditional landscape styles (done well!) and more experimental approaches to the genre, such as images created using intentional camera movement and long exposure work. The latter technique has become increasingly popular, so the standards are rapidly heading higher. We love to see fresh views of wildlife, from both the UK and overseas. Although it's easy to perceive African wildlife as more exotic than that found in the UK, I've seen plenty of images of UK wildlife that have the wow factor. In some ways, it's even more pleasing to have your eyes opened to something that is close to home and more familiar. We also cover macro photography of plants and small creatures, plus we have increasing coverage of adventure photography subjects, such as mountain biking, hiking, and backcountry skiing.'

*OP* runs a wide range of feature formats each month, from multi-page technique pieces and photography showcases to one-page insight articles. 'We also run a one-page feature called Inside Track that doesn't feature any photography at all! It can explore anything to do with the wider experience of being an outdoor photographer.'

The tone and style changes depending on the type of feature, but everything is aimed at a knowledgeable reader. 'We always look to aim content at photographers who already know at least a reasonable amount about the craft,' said Steve. 'We don't run features aimed at total beginners. Our readers are generally very capable of producing technically strong images, so we tend to aim at firing up their imaginations with more creative features.'

*Outdoor Photography* is almost entirely contributed by freelancers. 'Of course, many of them are photographers as well as writers, and we are generally driven more by the imagery than the words, but having said that, I am always open to a compelling written feature, and would be more lenient on the photography in those cases (but not too lenient!).'

Potential writers should be familiar with the magazine before contacting Steve by email, with a very brief idea plus up to five low resolution images, if applicable. 'I love it when our contributors come up with really fresh and challenging ways of looking at what it means to be an outdoor photographer,' said Steve.

One-page articles are usually paid around £100, with the longer features going up to £300-400.

**Details:** email: [steve@thegmcgroup.com](mailto:steve@thegmcgroup.com); website: [www.outdoorphotographymagazine.co.uk](http://www.outdoorphotographymagazine.co.uk)



## Refining the brief

Even the simplest brief needs thought and investigation, advises **Patrick Forsyth**

Currently I am helping collect short stories for a (charity) anthology. The details do not matter, suffice to say that the prescribed length is 1,500-3,500 words. One submission came in and was 700 words, far enough off brief to rule it out from being included. Why do people do this? When writing, certainly writing something designed for a particular purpose, a magazine perhaps, a degree of precision is sensible.

Many possible outlets for writing specify something, and sometimes quite a lot of something, about what they want. It makes sense to take heed of this. Of course, you can write something else and submit it elsewhere or submit it explaining why you feel it does suit, but just to send something ignoring the brief seems ill advised. Consider an example: the Saturday issue of *The Daily Telegraph* travel section has a feature open to entries called 'Just back'. Successful entries are published and receive a £200 prize, with the best of the year receiving £1,000. At the foot of the column a brief description highlights that the terms and conditions of entry can be viewed online ([www.telegraph.co.uk/justback](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/justback)). Here a full page of details sets out, amongst other things, that entries must be from UK residents not employed by the newspaper, that entries should not have been published or received a prize and that anyone sending a successful entry must be prepared to engage in publicity. All such background is no doubt important. More relevant is the word count 'no more than 500 words', but the only specific guidance beyond that is that contributors should send a 'feature article on their travel experiences'. Such a description is not untypical, but hardly comprehensively explanatory either.

Another check before clicking on Word and waxing lyrical about your latest misadventure with a budget airline or how an odd-shaped birthday package, destined for your sibling in Australia, was unceremoniously unwrapped by airport security as their dog fancied its smell, is surely necessary. You have to read a number of winning entries and with a weekly publication this means buying the paper for what? Four or five weeks, perhaps. And asking yourself what seems to appeal to the judges: are winning entries serious or light-hearted? Do particular destinations apparently find favour? Are the pieces informative or incident based?

So, on the one hand such a thing appears simple: just a couple of hundred words with a very broad brief. On the other, it being worth submitting a piece clearly demands some consideration and research. This is only a particular example of the basic principle that it is usually best to have a clear idea of what you are trying to create before you start to write, and that the clear idea needs to relate specifically to the destination you have in mind for something, certainly if you hope to get it published. **VW**

## FLASHES

*Woman Alive* monthly magazine for Christian women is edited by Jackie Harris, who invites ideas for features between 750 and 1,600 words. Payment is from £70 to £125.

**Details:** Christian Publishing and Outreach, Garcia Estate, Canterbury Road, Worthing, W Sussex BN13 1BW; tel: 01903 604352; email: [womanalive@cpo.org.uk](mailto:womanalive@cpo.org.uk)

The keynote speeches at the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) will be delivered by David Fickling, Jonny Duddle, Sarah McIntyre and Philip Reeve. The theme of the conference, which takes place at the University of Winchester on 21 and 22 November, is 'how to create lifelong readers.' Website: <http://britishisles.scbwi.org/conference2015/>

Scribe is a new literary festival that will take place in Middlewich, Cheshire, between 12-17 October, and includes specialist writing workshops on poetry, non-fiction and writing for radio.

**Website:** [www.scribefest.org](http://www.scribefest.org)

Labour MP Paul Flynn's humorous guide *How to Be an MP* was the most popular book summer choice among MPs, a survey by Blackwell's bookshop found.

'Puns are the highest form of literature.'

**Alfred Hitchcock**

## Career support for playwrights in Scotland

Playwrights resident in Scotland who are looking to experiment with their writing on a particular project are invited to apply for up to £3,250 Writers Projects support from the Playwrights' Studio, who will also manage and provide administrative support and financial management for your project.

Support will be offered on the basis of the originality and ambition of your ideas, how it will benefit your career and contribute to the development of your writing and how it will give you the opportunity to do something you would not be able to do otherwise. This might be time spent on a spend on a writing residency, research, working with a translator, contacting a director and actors to develop your script in a workshop or the inclusion of others in a collaborative situation to develop your work. These ideas are not definitive and anything that goes beyond them could gain support. The website has details of past projects that have been supported.

As Playwrights' Studio does not commission or produce plays Writers Project cannot be used to substitute or top-up commissioning fees from theatres or to self commission a play and there can be no contribution to production costs.

To apply you must have had at least two stage plays professionally produced and not have already received funding for the same activity. There is information as to what constitutes a professional production on the website.

An application form (available from the website) should be completed and you should describe your project in less than 100 words and then outline the project in more detail to include information on any other artists to be involved. Include also a brief biography, an outline of costs and information on how the project will help the development of your writing and your career.

Applications should be emailed or posted before the deadline of 5pm on 27 November and you will hear of the outcome of your submission no later than January 2016.

**Details:** Emma McKee, General Manager, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, CCA, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3JD; email: [emma@playwrightsstudio.co.uk](mailto:emma@playwrightsstudio.co.uk); website: [www.playwrightsstudio.co.uk/resources/writers-projects/how-to-apply](http://playwrightsstudio.co.uk/resources/writers-projects/how-to-apply)

## Rhyme it out loud

The Out-Spoken Prize for Poetry is open for entries.

The overall winner will receive £500 and other category winners will each be awarded £100. All winners will be invited to perform their poetry at an Out-Spoken live poetry event at The Forge, Camden, in November.

The four categories in which poets may enter are:

- Innovation in poetry: for poets whose work breaks away from traditional forms and may be regarded as experimental.
- Political poetry: poems which display a strong political theme and explore social issues.
- Poetry performance: for a poem performed by its author. Submissions in this category must be made in video format.
- Poetry film: entrants should submit links to films made or adapted specifically from poems. Submissions must be in video format.

In the last two categories, videos posted on the entrant's personal YouTube or Vimeo pages will be accepted.

All poems must be original and unperformed. Each submissions costs £5, and should be made, and paid for, via the online submission system.

The closing date is 2 November.

**Website:** [www.outspokenldn.com](http://www.outspokenldn.com)

## GLOBAL ZINE MARKET

### A spot of surrealism

BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON

*Leopardskin & Limes* is a German-based zine with a modern outlook and funky attitude. Definitely a market for the under-thirties, but a provoking read for anyone.

The editors want poetry and short stories, 'writing that crosses borders... makes us feel things that we didn't know we could feel... or... entertain the pants off of us [sic].'

Poems and stories may be submitted by anyone, anywhere, anytime, but the editors only read in March, June, September and December. No reprints, simultaneous submissions are accepted with the usual proviso. This team reads blind, so keep name, contact details, any personal details off the file. Submit work in a standard publishing format, in Times New Roman font. Put the name of the work in the body of the email. No bio, or a cover letter please. You may submit two pieces of flash fiction if each is under 1,000 words; no more than four poems at a time.

Fiction should be anything up to 3,000 words. Flash fiction must tell a story. The more 'off the wall, surreal

and surprising' the better. 'Wildly hilarious' is highly acceptable too. Think surreal rather than post-modern.

Poetry should use simple language, concrete imagery and be written 'from the guts.' Avoid 'poems about breakups, drinking in bars, and the seasons as metaphors for your heart.'

Response time is four weeks from the end of the reading month. Payment and rights are 'with the editors.'

**Details:** email poetry to: [poetry@leopardskinandlimes.com](mailto:poetry@leopardskinandlimes.com); email stories to: [stories@leopardskinandlimes.com](mailto:stories@leopardskinandlimes.com); website: [www.leopardskinandlimes.com](http://www.leopardskinandlimes.com)



# GLOBAL SPECIFIC MARKET

## *Spiritual sci fi*

BY GARY DALKIN

*Mysterion* is to be a new American anthology of speculative fiction intended to rediscover the mysteries of the Christian faith. Editors Donald S Crankshaw and Kristin Janz are looking for science fiction, fantasy and horror fiction up to 10,000 words which features Christian themes, characters, or cosmology. Donald likes fast-paced plots with plenty of twists. Kristen favours elegant prose with a compelling emotional arc. Both say 'save the preaching for church. We're more interested in the questions than the answers, the challenges than the solutions.'

Donald and Kristin love science fiction, fantasy and ghost stories, and think 'there's great fiction material hidden in the mysteries of Christian theology – cherubim, leviathan, nephilim, visions, prophecy, and more.'

Stories must engage with Christianity, whether through Christian characters whose faith affects their actions, the exploration of Christian themes such as grace and redemption, or by presenting a Christian view of the supernatural. This does not mean that you have to be a Christian to submit a story, or that submissions need to be unambiguously pro-Christian: 'If you can tell a good story that meaningfully engages with

Christianity, we want to read it.' And 'feel free to use sex, violence, and profanity as needed. All three appear in the Bible, after all. But make sure they actually improve your story.'

The opening date for submissions is 15 October, with the closing date not yet set. Publication will be digital and print on demand.

Payment is 6¢ per word for original stories and translations of stories that have not previously appeared in English, 3¢ per word for reprints. This is for exclusive one-year worldwide print and electronic rights (with exceptions for year's best anthologies), and non-exclusive rights in perpetuity.

No multiple or simultaneous submissions. Include your story title, byline, word count, and contact details on the first page, and your last name and story title with the page number on all other pages. Send as a doc, docx or rtf attachment in an email to [submissions@mysterionanthology.com](mailto:submissions@mysterionanthology.com) titled FICTION: <story title> by <byline>. In your cover letter mention your three or four best publications, if any, and give a brief note of any experience relevant to your submission.

Details: email: [editors@mysterionanthology.com](mailto:editors@mysterionanthology.com); website: [www.mysterionanthology.com](http://www.mysterionanthology.com)



## Underneath the (nine) arches

Nine Arches Press will open its next bi-annual submission window for poetry collections between 14 October and 30 November.

Submissions for full-length collections may be sent by debut and emerging poets who have not previously published a collection for Nine Arches Press's Debut series. Submissions are also accepted from established poets who have previously published collections. Poets submitting to Nine Arches Press should have a record of

previous publication.

Send a sample of twenty poems in one document. The poems should not have already been published as a collection either in physical form or online as a collection. Include a short biographical note including information about any previous or forthcoming publications. Submit through the online submission system.

Nine Arches Press is an independent poetry press based in the Midlands, but has no regional bias and is interested in

publishing work from poets nationally.

- *Under the Radar*, Nine Arches Press's flagship magazine, has an open submission window between 7 October and 7 December. Send up to six original, unpublished poems and short fiction up to a maximum 3,000 words through the online submission system. Include a covering letter with a full postal address and a short biographical note (fifty words) written in third person.

Website: <http://ninearchespress.com>

## Wild play

Ten-minute plays about endangered species are wanted for a staged reading at a California theatre, in the Saving Endangered Species International Playwriting Prize, in aid of the Jane Goodall Institute. Writers of eight selected plays will each receive \$100.

To enter the free competition, first select a specific endangered species (see <http://writ.rs/endangeredspeciesgallery>), eg the red rain frog or tomato frog and not just 'frogs'. The species must be integral to the plot of your play and not just mentioned.

'Astonish the audience with the magnificence of the species, take us on an adventure, make us laugh, make us cry, make up weep if they're gone, motivate the audience to save them!' say guidelines.

Plays can be comedic or dramatic and can be for young audiences although roles will be played by adult actors.

Submit only one original, unpublished play in English or translated into English. There should be a maximum of four actors and props and any actions should be kept simple.

Include a title page with your name, address, phone number and email address together with a page containing the cast list, location/time, playwright notes/glossary, name of species and the CITES number or source that has listed the species as endangered.

Submit by email before 30 November, in doc or pdf format, with 'Script Submission' and the title of your play in the subject line, to: [sesprize@yahoo.com](mailto:sesprize@yahoo.com). In the body include your name, contact details and the name of the species. The winners will be announced on the website and notified by email before 31 May 2016. Website: [www.sesprize.com](http://www.sesprize.com)

## A lucky beggar will win this comp

Galley Beggar Press, the award-winning independent press set up to promote ambitious, ground-breaking writing that first published Eimear McBride, has launched a new creative writing prize, the Galley Beggar Press Short Story Prize 2015.

The prize reflects the success of the monthly Galley Beggar Singles Club, a monthly subscription service promoting original short stories.

The winner of the competition may choose between a cash prize of £500 or year-long editorial support from the directors of Galley Beggar Press for a writing project (five one-hour face-to-face or Skype sessions plus reading a project up to 70,000 words). Galley Beggar Press will have the exclusive right to publish the winning, shortlisted and longlisted stories for six months, and the winning stories will be anthologised in an ebook which will be sent to subscribers of the Galley Beggar Singles Club as well as sold in the online bookstore.

Entries may be by published or unpublished writers from anywhere in the world, and must be original, unpublished short stories. Stories may be up to 6,000 words.

Submit entries through the website as Word docs or pdfs. Include an extra sheet with contact details, title of story and wordcount. Writers who need to submit by post should send an email to [info@galleybeggar.co.uk](mailto:info@galleybeggar.co.uk).

There is an entry fee of £10, which may be paid via PayPal.

The closing date is 15 November.

Website: <http://galleybeggar.co.uk/2015-short-story-prize>

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## Competitions



Next poetry competition,  
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# How to Become a Successful Writer!



By Marian Ashcroft

If you've ever fancied being a writer but don't know where to start – here's the answer. For the past twenty-six years The Writers Bureau has been running a home-study Creative Writing course that teaches ordinary people how to write, get published and earn an extra income.

'Most people can be taught to write for publication,' claims Susan Busby, Head of Britain's largest writing college, 'as long as they want to write, are willing to learn and put in the time and effort required. Our students prove that. They come from all walks of life and have very different educational backgrounds. Yet, after studying with us many will see their name in print for the first time.'

The Creative Writing course offered by The Writers Bureau covers all genres – articles, short stories, novels, books, scripts etc. so students get a chance to explore all types of writing to find where their interests and talents lie.

Students also receive individual, personal tuition from a professional writer who gives guidance on style, technique and marketing.

'The course gives a student confidence in their work and the know-how to increase their chances of publication,' explains Susan. 'Unfortunately, the untrained writer is more likely to have their work returned to them, not because they can't write, but because they haven't followed the rules of the publishing world. And that, in a large part, is what we teach – how to make your work acceptable to those who will pay for it.'

The college also provides a whole support system to novice writers that includes their tutors, their advisors, free resources and chance to converse with other writing students on their website.

The Writers Bureau is so confident in the training and support it provides that it gives an amazing money back guarantee – if a student doesn't earn their fees back through published writing by the end of their course the college will refund them in full. Plus, the course comes on 15-day trial so you can see for yourself the quality of the training on offer.

To find out more about how The Writers Bureau can help you become a successful, published writer contact them for a free prospectus:

0800 856 2008

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**Tim Skelton** "Besides seeing my first book in print, I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated yet more guide-books for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA. I am writing flat-out, and getting paid what I can now describe with pride as a decent salary. And it is thanks to The Writers Bureau that I got this chance. It provided me with the opportunity to realise an ambition which I didn't know how to nurture. I do now."



**Hannah Evans** "I've been published in The Guardian and Good Life earning £400. And now I've got my first book published by Bloomsbury called MOB Rule: Lessons Learned by a Mother of Boys. The Writers Bureau course provided me with structure, stopped my procrastination but most importantly it provided the impetus to try something different."



**Chris Green** "I've had 30 pieces of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago. I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time. Thanks to the careful and patient tutoring provided by The Writers Bureau and the boundless confidence this has given me, I can continue to explore my potential and see where it takes me."



**Jane Isaac** "When I started the Writers Bureau course, I wanted to explore avenues for my writing and develop and strengthen my personal style. I had no idea that it would lead to me being a published writer of novels and short stories. I still pinch myself when I receive emails and messages from readers who've enjoyed my work or when I give talks to book clubs and visit bookstores to do signings. These are magical moments that have changed my life – my dream has come true."

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# My Writing day

# ANN CLEEVES

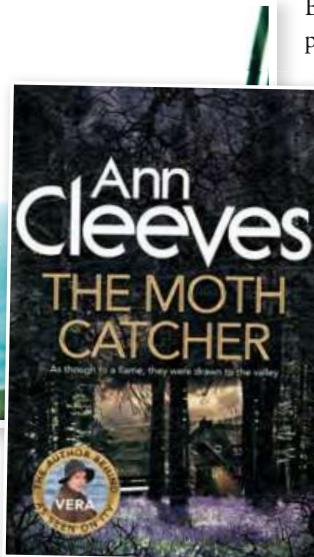
The crime-writer tells Lynne Hackles that she takes a no-nonsense approach to her very busy existence

**A**nn Cleeves is the author of the Vera Stanhope and Shetland novels which are now both television series. She has 29 novels published and has sold over a million copies worldwide. She is one of the UK's most successful crime writers.

'The more successful a writer becomes the more demands there are on their time,' she says. 'There are festivals, book tours, events and interviews like this. I have domestic responsibilities too – my two daughters live locally, are very busy and have six children between them so I'm often called upon to help with childcare and school runs. But I wouldn't have it any other way. If I hid myself away in an office, I wouldn't pick up the material that feeds into the novels.'

'I try to catch up with the *Vera* team at least once during the filming of each episode. It's filming the sixth season now so I've become very friendly with the regulars, not just Brenda Blethyn, who plays my character so brilliantly, but the technical crew. *Shetland*, in which Douglas Henshall plays Detective Jimmy Perez, is more difficult because it's such a trek and my regular visits don't always coincide with filming, but I'm always made very welcome. I get invited to the read-throughs on both series and that's a good way to meet the cast.'

'I write when I can. Usually that's early in the morning. My brain works best then and there's something very relaxing about sitting in my pyjamas and telling stories. But I think the most important skill for a writer is concentration and if I'm focused I can write anywhere – in trains, airport



lounges or weird hotels.

'I have few completely free days so writing is often organised round other things. A free writing day is a luxury. I'm not sure I get more work done then though. If I know there is limited time I make sure I don't get distracted.'

'I'm relatively organised and have never yet missed a deadline. The urgent stuff gets done first and then everything else is fitted around it. The family is always a priority.'

'I live in Vera country, in the slightly shabby seaside town of Whitley Bay. I love it. I don't think I'd be comfortable anywhere else. North East England is an inspiration. It has a stunning coast and beautiful uplands, but also a very interesting post-industrial landscape. Every view hides a story.'

'Before I could read and write I told stories in my head but I first started writing seriously when my two children were small. Some days there was only half an hour free for writing while they were playing in the garden so there was no way I could procrastinate. I don't have much patience with people who allow themselves to be distracted! For me, writing still feels like a guilty pleasure. I love it but sometimes need a breather and that's when I look at Twitter or Facebook. I'm lucky

enough to have a good publicity team to help with promotion now.'

Ann isn't sure how many books she has written. 'I don't know the exact number but it must be more than 25.' Her publicity people say it is 29. 'My first novel was *A Bird in the Hand*. It's available after a long absence through Bello books. At the moment I'm preparing the publicity for the new Vera novel, *The Moth Catcher*'

*The Moth Catcher* is the seventh Vera book and is set in the quiet community of Valley Farm in Northumberland where Patrick, a young ecologist, is house-sitting. DCI Vera Stanhope arrives on the scene when Patrick's body is found in a lane leading into the valley. When Vera and her team check the house they discover a second body. This one is in the attic. Both of these men had only one thing in common – a fascination with moths. Vera is slowly drawn into the world of this valley and its secrets.

'The latest, and sixth novel in the Shetland series is *Thin Air*,' says Ann. 'It's set in Unst, the most northerly island in the UK and is about a group of university friends who come north to celebrate a wedding. They arrive feeling a little superior and end up rather intimidated by the place and the people, well out of their comfort zone.'

'It takes me about nine months to write a novel. They often start with a conversation, a place or an idea. I never plot in advance. I write like a reader and have to write the next chapter to find out what happens next. Research consists of chatting to people. Good friends include a forensic scientist, an ex-crime scene investigator and a pathologist. I'll go out and research if there's anything specific I need to find out.'

'This has been a difficult year because I've fitted an extra project – a non-fiction book about Shetland – into my normal writing schedule. And now I'm writing a new Shetland book.'

**Website:** [www.anncleeves.com](http://www.anncleeves.com)

## WRITING PLACE

'I write at the kitchen table with a view of the garden.'

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# NOT NOW, I'M WORKING!

At home doesn't mean at ease for **Lorraine Mace**, but try telling anyone else that

**T**he column this month will probably resonate with at least two sets of people – those who work from home and those who live in a tourist destination. Anyone falling into both categories, as I do, will be nodding and cheering (or possibly crying) by the end.

Let's start with the lucky souls who work from home. They are the ones who receive cheeky requests from friends and relatives. The person working at home will be interrupted and pulled away from whatever he or she was working on, but that doesn't matter, because it's not as if it could be important. I mean, the person's at home, so must have all the time in the world, right?

Picture the scene: you've finally made progress with a project that has had you tearing your hair out for days, when the phone rings. Although tempted to ignore it, you can't. It might be important. As soon as you hear the harassed tone you wish you'd listened to your inner voice yelling: don't answer the phone!

'Could you pop out and get me xyz? I'd do it myself, but I'm at work.'

Deep breath before answering. 'So am I.'

'So are you what?' comes the confused response.

'Working. I'm at work,' you say.

'No, you're not. I called your home number.'

This is where you explain for the hundredth time that, yes, you are at home, but your home is also your place of work. There might be a split second

of silence before you hear: 'Oh, okay, but can you pop out for me? I can't go. I'm at work.'

Coming a close second to unwanted phone calls, that leave you needing half an hour to calm down before you can refocus on the project in hand, is the assumption that you sit twiddling your thumbs, willing the hours to pass.

'But what do you do all day?'  
Saying you work isn't enough.  
Even spelling out how busy  
you are is met with patent  
disbelief. 'But surely you  
must get bored!'

I work longer hours  
now than I ever did in an  
office. I wish I had time to  
get bored.

Living on the Costa del Sol, a prime Spanish tourist destination, the issue of my work being something that can fit around the wishes of others is compounded. It's amazing how many long-lost relatives suddenly wanted to rekindle family ties when word got out that I'd relocated to paradise. Suggestions that I might like to receive a visit from a distant cousin and his entire brood are easily dealt with. I usually reply saying sorry I don't have the room, but offer to find an apartment if they could let me know what level of rent they would find comfortable. Amazingly, I rarely get a reply.

Close family members are, of course, always welcome, but even they don't understand the work situation. Saying I can't take off the entire summer, but could juggle things for a couple of weeks so that I only work mornings, brings

indulgent smiles and metaphorical pats on the head. 'We'll amuse ourselves until lunch.'

Oh, if only that were true. My mother used to put her head round the door every twenty minutes asking how I was getting along.

'Do you need anything?'  
'No, Mum, I'm fine. I just need to finish this.'

'Okay,' she'd say, only to reappear less than half an hour later. 'Nearly done!'

I'd shake my head, biting my lip because I didn't want to snap. She'd shut the door and then open it again almost immediately.

'Are you sure you don't want a cup of tea? A biscuit? Water?'

For the last couple of years my sister and her husband have been over. This year they brought their five-year-old granddaughter with them. Given strict instructions not to disturb me, she promised to be good. And she was – very good. She turned up five to ten times each morning to let me know how good she was being.

It seemed whenever I reached a particularly tricky interrogation, a little voice would pipe up from the doorway. 'Hello, Auntie Raine. I'm not coming in.'

I typed and retyped a section of dialogue so many times it felt like a scene from the film *Groundhog Day*. Which is why in the fifth DI Paolo Storey novel, when it comes out next year, Paolo repeats his question over and over. As a result, the killer accuses him of mental abuse – I know just how he feels! **W.M.**